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THE PREACHING AND PASTORAL MINISTRY  
OF CHARLES JERRY VINES: A MODEL  
OF EVANGELISTIC FOCUS

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Jeffrey Donovan Pennington

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**APPROVAL SHEET**

THE PREACHING AND PASTORAL MINISTRY  
OF CHARLES JERRY VINES: A MODEL  
OF EVANGELISTIC FOCUS

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To Alison,  
my gift, whose resilient love  
encourages me to fix my  
gaze on my Savior

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## PREFACE

As I reflect on the completion of this task, I am utterly humbled and overwhelmed. When I arrived on the campus of Southern Seminary in August of 2000, I was fresh out of college. I could fit everything I owned in the back of my vehicle. I had hopes to one day marry, have children, and fulfill the call God had given me. I never dreamed of the glorious blessings that awaited me.

I will be forever grateful to the faculty of Southern Seminary. Professor Timothy Beougher has been more than a professional mentor to me. His exemplary living, teaching, and zeal for evangelism have left an impression that will continue with me until I enter heaven. Dean Lawless tolerated the many hours I monopolized his office time. Thinking of him reminds me of Moses' description of Enoch, because he walks with God (Gen 5:22). Hershael York, as much as any other person, has ingrained into me a commitment to expository, applicational preaching. Adam Greenway, though not a member of my committee, extended to me his friendship and encouragement as I proceeded in my coursework. I greatly benefited from being his Garrett Fellow. I would be remiss for not mentioning the endless encouragement given to me by Eddie Hatfield. These men are tremendous scholars. They are equally incredible disciplers.

I am also indebted for the opportunity to be the pastor of Highland Park First Baptist Church in Jeffersontown, Kentucky. This loving fellowship of believers has extended immeasurable grace and support to me as I have progressed through my education. My heart overflows with love for them. I am thankful for the privilege to be their pastor. Linda Harris, Matt McQueen, and Nuno Norberto have been more than fellow coworkers, for they have become like family and have shouldered the work of the ministry when the demands of doctoral work became great. Laura Abell responded to the

Holy Spirit's nudge to come alongside of me and edit every chapter and footnote of this dissertation. I lost count of the many hours she committed to my work. I am thankful that she did, too.

I am also thankful for Dr. Jerry Vines. The time and trust he extended to me as I analyzed and evaluated his ministry can never be repaid. I have found him to be the same person away from the pulpit as he is while behind it.

Finally, the most important words of thanks are reserved for my family. My parents, John and Carol Pennington, encouraged me to pursue the Doctor of Philosophy degree even before I began working toward my Master of Divinity. Dad is the greatest soul winner I have ever known. My wife, Alison, has been an anchor of resilience and encouragement from the beginning of the Ph.D. program to its end. I love her more than ever, and I cannot wait to see our relationship grow in the years to come. Our three girls, Amelia, Sadie, and Paige, have patiently given up their daddy for these past five years for me to study, read, and write. If not for their loving support, I would not have been able to see this dissertation to its end.

Jeffrey Donovan Pennington

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2011

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### **Introduction**

In 1979, the Southern Baptist Convention began a religious shift known as the Conservative Resurgence.<sup>1</sup> When almost every mainline denomination veered from biblical inerrancy and conservatism, Southern Baptists stood in the face of liberalism and neo-orthodoxy in order to return to their Bible-centered roots. Thom Rainer recollects that Southern Baptists were told that one of the primary benefits of the Resurgence “would be an unprecedented evangelistic harvest in the denomination.”<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, twenty-five years after the Resurgence began, Rainer’s work revealed this promise had yet to be realized. He analyzed the total baptisms of the denomination from 1950-2003 and discovered that the North American churches of the Southern Baptist Convention were reaching no more people at the end of these years than they did in 1950. Since 1950,

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<sup>1</sup>For a comprehensive treatment of the Conservative Resurgence from the conservative perspective, consult James C. Hefley, *The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Hannibal, MO: Hannibal Books, 1991); Paul Pressler, *A Hill on Which to Die* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999); and Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000). For a moderate perspective on the controversy, consult Grady C. Cothen, *The New SBC: Fundamentalism’s Impact on the Southern Baptist Convention* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 1995); Bill J. Leonard, *God’s Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Walter B. Shurden, *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup>Thom S. Rainer, “A Resurgence Not Yet Realized: Evangelistic Effectiveness in the Southern Baptist Convention Since 1979,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9.1 (2005): 55.

a year in which 376,085 baptisms were recorded, yearly figures have remained in tight range. In 1972, the highest number of baptisms were documented, totaling 445,725. The lowest recorded number occurred in 1978, when Southern Baptist baptisms only totaled 336,050. Even since the Resurgence, Rainer discovered no discernable improvements of baptismal trends through 2003, and the baptism numbers in the years since Rainer's article have not altered these conclusions.<sup>3</sup>

I find the present lack of evangelistic fruitfulness of Southern Baptists not only concerning, but heartbreaking. In the present milieu of evangelistic ineffectiveness, examples of pastors who display notable evangelistic leadership need to be sought after and studied. This dissertation will present Charles Jerry Vines as such a pastor worthy of study. With a resume that includes service as the President of the Alabama Pastor's Conference, President of the Pastor's Conference of the Southern Baptist Convention, a two-term stay as President of the Southern Baptist Convention, and a member of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 committee, Vines has been one of the prominent voices in convention life.

Besides being a denominational leader, Vines is also known to be a faithful expository preacher. Early in his ministry, he committed himself to being an expositor, and throughout his years of service to the local church, he persistently practiced and developed this methodology of preaching.<sup>4</sup> Michael Dudit, the editor of *Preaching Magazine*, commends Vines as being the most consistent expositor among all the well

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 54-69. Since this article was published, the convention's annual baptism numbers have continued to decline. Despite the "Everyone Can" emphasis of 2006 to baptize one million persons within the year, baptisms for 2006 instead declined by 1.89 percent—364,826 in 2006 versus 371,850 in 2005. See Art Toalston, "Impact of 'Everyone Can' assessed," *Baptist Press* (17 April 2007), [on-line]; accessed on 12 March 2009; available from <http://www.sbc Baptist Press.org/BPnews.asp?ID=25409>; Internet.

<sup>4</sup>Jerry Vines, "The Richness of Expository Preaching," (1976), audiocassette.

known Southern Baptist pastors.<sup>5</sup> Vines' highest selling book, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*, co-written with Jim Shaddix, possesses content that has been utilized in seminary classes since even before its publication. Shaddix edits, contemporizes, and reorganizes two of Vines' previous books on preaching into a format that has been used and taught to hundreds of aspiring expositors.<sup>6</sup>

Academia recognizes Vines' preaching as being worthy of study. For example, Lester David Kitchens includes Vines within his dissertation and compares his expository preaching with other expositors who experienced evangelistic results.<sup>7</sup> A dissertation written by Timothy A. Hight compares the preaching style of Vines to former Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) presidents Adrian Rogers and Charles Stanley.<sup>8</sup> Effective denominational leadership and faithful exposition are both marks of Vines' ministry.

There is yet another notable mark of Vines' ministry, and this one arrests my attention for its connection to evangelism and church growth. Consistent evangelistic results occurred throughout the breadth of Vines' pastoral ministry in a variety of church settings. Interestingly, Vines' years of service closely span the same years that Rainer analyzed in his aforementioned work. I must note in agreement with Rainer that the baptism figures that follow are at best "somewhat a reflection of conversion growth," but they "can give us insight into the overall evangelistic effectiveness" of the leadership of

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<sup>5</sup>Michael Duduit, *Preaching with Power: Dynamic Insights from Twenty Top Pastors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 198.

<sup>6</sup>Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup>Lester David Kitchens, "An Examination of the Degree of Effectiveness of Expository Preaching in Obtaining Evangelistic Results" (Th.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989).

<sup>8</sup>Timothy A. Hight, "A Comparative Homiletical Analysis of Selected Southern Baptist Convention Presidents From 1979 through 1989" (Th.D. diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991).

the pastor who experienced them.<sup>9</sup> The years Vines spent as pastor of West Rome Baptist Church in Rome, Georgia (1968-1974) saw an average of 111.14 baptisms per year while the church doubled in membership from 1,012 to 2,173.<sup>10</sup> While Vines was pastor at Dauphin Way Baptist Church in Mobile, Alabama (1974-1979), the church averaged 250.7 baptisms and grew its total membership from 6,595 members in 1974 to 7,832 members in 1979.<sup>11</sup> Most recently, with Vines as the co-pastor/pastor of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida (1982-2006), the church averaged 835.1 baptisms per year. The church's resident membership more than doubled, growing from 10,117 members to 22,239 members. Sunday School attendance grew from 4,747 in 1982 to 5,290 in 2006, fluctuating greatly from year to year, but reaching an all time high in 1988 of 6,720.<sup>12</sup> These baptism statistics speak of significant evangelistic effectiveness, for in the course of his ministry the churches Vines served as pastor baptized over 23,000 converts.

These numbers demonstrate lifelong evangelistic commitment, yet they also merit honest critique. Consider the baptism figures reported above for the years of Vines' tenure at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida. Had the church retained half of its reported baptisms and kept all other figures equal, the Sunday School attendance could have increased an average of 417 persons per year. Over the course of Vines' tenure, this retention rate would have led to an accumulative increase in Sunday School attendance of 10,425 persons. When added to the reported 4,747 Sunday School attendance of his first year as First Baptist's pastor, it would have been reasonable to expect for the church, in

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<sup>9</sup>Rainer, "A Resurgence Not Yet Realized," 56.

<sup>10</sup>Statistics obtained on 18 October 2006 from Kathleen Harris, Research Assistant of Research Services, Georgia Baptist Convention. Kathleen Harris, Georgia Baptist Convention.

<sup>11</sup>Statistics obtained on 13 October 2006 from Mickey W. Crawford, Statistical Programmer, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

<sup>12</sup>Statistics obtained on 11 October 2006 from Rachel D. Tracey, Department Secretary for Information Support Services, Florida Baptist Convention.

2006, to have reported an average Sunday School attendance of 15,172 persons. The Sunday School peak attendance of 6,720 in 1988 falls considerably beneath this expectation.

Thus, this dissertation discusses the areas of Vines' ministry worthy of emulation while also speaking of the aspects that could be bolstered and strengthened. I applaud his ministry when it is appropriate, but I also recognize that there are aspects of his ministry, as is the case with any person's ministry, that will leave the reader wanting.

### **Thesis**

I researched Vines' preaching and pastoral ministry to ascertain the qualities of Vines' ministry worthy of emulation and discovered four noteworthy aspects that contributed to his evangelistic focus. First, a biographical study of Vines reveals a man who has sincerely walked with God. Both his peers in the ministry and church members he served as pastor speak of him with admiration and respect.<sup>13</sup> One cannot underscore the importance of a preacher's piety. Paul instructed the young preacher Timothy to "pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you" (1 Tim 4:16 HCSB). Clearly, Paul connected the content of a preacher's teaching with the quality of his faithful living. For this reason, Vines explains, "The Bible makes very clear that the preacher preaches by his life as well as by his lips: there is a sense in which what a man *is* is more important than what he says. There is great strength in the silent sermon of a godly life."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Florida Baptist Witness Staff, "Church members, SBC leaders reflect on Vines' ministry," *Florida Baptist Witness* (February 2006), [on-line]; accessed 19 October 2006; available from <http://www.floridabaptistwitness.com/5505.article>; Internet.

<sup>14</sup> Jerry Vines, *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 30.

Second, I am drawn to his assertion that the theological framework for his evangelism set the course for his evangelistic methodology. In a personal interview with me, he stated, “My theology has driven my methodology in that I have never been able and never been willing to do anything methodologically that I felt was inconsistent with good theology.”<sup>15</sup> This statement supports the position that the practical ministry decisions of an effective evangelistic pastor should be filtered through the scrutiny of orthodox theology. Thorough investigation of Vines’ theology, as uncovered in his writings, preaching, and personal interviews, support my assertion that he is, indeed, an exemplary pastor. While it is true there are nuances in anyone’s theology with which another is sure to disagree, I have discovered that Vines’ theology is consistent with Baptist orthodoxy as presented in the *Baptist Faith and Message*.

A third area that has captured my attention is found in Vines’ teaching and practice of expository preaching. He contends that every sermon he preaches should be expository in nature and conclude in an invitation to receive Christ. He explains the rationale behind this homiletical approach is that in order for the Bible to be rightly preached, a message must possess a gospel plea. While preaching a message entitled, “The Final Appeal,” he stated,

Every time we gather together, Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening, when Dr. Lindsay and I preach the message and come to the conclusion we always give a gospel invitation and invite people to come to Jesus and be saved. Have you ever wondered why we always invite people to decide to receive Jesus as their Savior and go to heaven? There is a difference between Bible preaching and just speaking about other subjects. Bible preaching always brings with it a call for decision. Bible truth is not something that is just information that is to be received and then be dismissed to go home. Bible truth is always information which is to be received and then acted upon. It is never enough to receive the gospel as information but it is to be received and then responded to.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Jerry Vines, a personal interview with the author, 17 August 2006.

<sup>16</sup>Jerry Vines, “The Final Appeal,” [on-line]; a sermon manuscript accessed on 28 October 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

When Vines preaches, he offers an invitation to come to Christ. Near the end of a sermon, he advocates transitioning from sermon to invitation via what he calls an “evangelistic twist.” He believes that while most of the Bible is written to Christians, a sermon has not been fully preached until an appeal is offered for lost persons to come to Christ. He preaches this way, because “if there is a heaven, and there is; if there is a hell, and there is; then, our greatest assignment is to tell people about Jesus, who died on the cross so people might not have to go to hell and can go to heaven.”<sup>17</sup> While various elements of Vines’ preaching have often been analyzed, never has particular attention been given to the mechanics of his evangelistic twist.<sup>18</sup>

Fourth, Vines’ preaching ministry piques my interest in the emphasis he placed on Acts at the beginning of most of his pastorates. He stated, “When I went to a church, I would start a series in the book of Acts and a lot of people bought into it.”<sup>19</sup> This statement impacted me with great force, especially when I shared it with David Crowe, a pastor, D.Min. Candidate at Southern Seminary, and former member of First Baptist Jacksonville, Florida. He responded that Acts was in the very DNA of the church.<sup>20</sup> These affirmations made me want to discover the content of Vines’ preaching to learn what exactly it was that his congregation “bought into” that contributed to the evangelistic fruitfulness of the churches he pastored.

Not only did Vines preach through Acts, but he also developed a thirteen week series of Sunday School lessons called *Acts Alive: A Witnessing Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. In the teacher’s manual, he explains: “the objective of this series of messages is to communicate to the members of your classes the motivations and methods essential to

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<sup>17</sup>Jerry Vines, e-mail interview with the author, 24 October 2008.

<sup>18</sup>Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 218.

<sup>19</sup>Jerry Vines, a personal interview with author, 17 August 2006.

<sup>20</sup>David Crowe, a personal interview with author, 18 September 2008.

being a witnessing church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, I obtained manuscripts of Vines’ most recent sermon series through the book of Acts, along with this Sunday School curriculum, to discover what it was in these resources that spurred on his congregation in the area of evangelism.

While my personal study of Vines’ ministry has led to these four areas of interest, if I were pursuing secondary literature on these areas I would emerge sorely disappointed. With the exception of a biographical DVD<sup>22</sup> and brief twenty page biography created by First Baptist Jacksonville, Florida,<sup>23</sup> one would not discover any extensive biographical treatment on the life and ministry of Vines. Furthermore, the already mentioned scholarly dissertations of which Vines is in part the topic have been limited in both number and scope. Kitchens’ work compares Vines’ expository preaching with other expositors who experienced evangelistic results.<sup>24</sup> This resource will prove helpful in my research, especially in its conclusion that Vines’ expository preaching produced evangelistic results. Yet, its comparative nature does not cover the scope of my particular interests. Hight’s work comparing Vines’ preaching style to that of Adrian Rogers and Charles Stanley does not examine the particular, observable contributions of his preaching that bolstered his exceptional evangelistic results.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Jerry Vines, *Acts Alive: A Witnessing Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Class Leader ed., (Jacksonville, FL: First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL, 2007), 1.

<sup>22</sup>First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, “A Faithful Soldier: A Tribute to the Life and Ministry of Dr. Jerry Vines,” (2006), DVD.

<sup>23</sup> Nancy Smith, “A Faithful Soldier,” in *A Faithful Soldier* (Jacksonville, FL: n.p., 2006), 11-28.

<sup>24</sup>Lester David Kitchens, “An Examination of the Degree of Effectiveness of Expository Preaching in Obtaining Evangelistic Results” (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989).

<sup>25</sup>Timothy A. Hight, “A Comparative Homiletical Analysis.”

The aim of this dissertation is to comprehensively uncover the elements of Vines' preaching and pastoral ministry that are indispensable to his approach to evangelism. This dissertation offers a biographical treatment of Vines to demonstrate that his life is marked by persistent personal evangelism, explores his theological framework pertinent to his approach to evangelism, surveys his expository preaching with an evangelistic twist, and analyzes his interpretation and application of the book of Acts. This dissertation will argue that there are aspects of Charles Jerry Vines' preaching and pastoral ministry that make him a worthy model of evangelistic focus in the context of the local church.

### **Background**

My first introduction to Vines' ministry was afforded me by my father as a high school student. Most summers, my family would travel during the summer months for annual vacations. My father, John Pennington, the pastor of First Baptist Church, Douglasville, Georgia, would often use this time off to visit churches that were experiencing sizable evangelistic growth. One of those trips landed my family at the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Florida. Though I had not yet felt a call to ministry, I will never forget the feeling of respect and admiration that I experienced as I visited First Baptist Church on that particular occasion. I attended a youth Sunday School class that was organized geographically by zip codes so that the class members all lived in the same area of the city. As I stepped into the 10,000 seat sanctuary, I was struck by its sheer size and the sweet spirit of the congregation. Interestingly, Vines was not the preacher that day, for Homer Lindsay, Jr. delivered the message. Still yet, it was my father's respect for Vines as a pastor and a preacher, coupled with my personal experience of visiting the church he pastored, that made an indelible impression upon my young mind.

Furthermore, my Master of Divinity studies in the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

helped to further germinate my interest in Vines. Near the beginning of my seminary experience, in the spring semester of 2001, I took Charles Lawless' class, "Introduction to Evangelism and Church Growth." In my final semester of Master of Divinity coursework, the fall semester of 2004, I took Thom Rainer's class, "Building an Evangelistic Church." These courses became book ends of my Master of Divinity experience in helping to develop some of the knowledge and desire to be a pastor who leads his church to becoming an evangelistic church. I was also impressed by Brad Waggoner's course, "The Ministry of Leadership," for in this course I was assigned the task of formulating a ten step strategic plan for the church that I still serve as pastor. I received a "B+" on that particular assignment and determined that if I did not want to be a "B+" pastor, I needed to work harder at learning effective leadership.

I began to peer into the ministry of men who were models of evangelistic pastors. One who was frequently applauded by the faculty and students of Southern Seminary as an exemplary evangelistic pastor and expositor was Vines. In "Preaching Practicum," my preaching professor, Hershael York, assigned Vines' *Power in the Pulpit* as one of our main texts on the subject of preparing and delivering expository sermons. York also gave me the privilege to participate with a Ph.D. seminar titled "Preaching in the Pastoral Context" as an independent study. One of the preachers the seminar studied for his evangelistic expository preaching was Vines. These experiences detail some of the ways that God impressed upon me the need for further academic study in the area of evangelism and preaching. In concert with the willingness and support of Highland Park First Baptist Church to allow me the privilege to be their pastor and pursue doctoral studies, I concluded that my seminary studies were not yet complete.

My doctoral studies in the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary have broadened and deepened my personal and professional interest in studying Vines as a model for effective evangelistic pastoral ministry. My initial Evangelism and Church Growth seminar was

“Spiritual Warfare in Evangelism and Missions,” led by professor Charles Lawless. After discussing the research paper topics with Lawless, I chose to write on the topic of spiritual warfare as portrayed in the book of Acts. Needless to say, the expectations of Ph.D. coursework led me to spend extensive time studying Acts. While I did not know it at the time, the effort and time put forth in studying Acts became an investment toward an important component of my dissertation’s thesis.

My first colloquium, led by professor Timothy Beougher, was also helpful in giving me the framework to think through Vines’ evangelistic twist. Beougher guided the class through an exhaustive study on the use and practice of the public invitation. The evangelistic twist is intended to lead a congregation smoothly from the sermon’s body into a time of invitation and decision. The colloquium’s analysis of the invitation became extremely helpful to me as I formulated my dissertation’s thesis.

The following semester, I enrolled in my second Evangelism and Church Growth seminar entitled, “The Methods and Influence of American Evangelists,” also led by professor Timothy Beougher. The paradigmatic evangelist that I chose to write on was George Whitefield. After saturating my mind with Whitefield’s life, evangelistic methodology, and theology, I wrote a paper I thought might lead to a dissertation topic. While receiving Beougher’s advisement after the course’s conclusion, I was encouraged to move toward a paradigmatic evangelist that was still living. He saw great benefit in this endeavor; not only for the academic benefit, but also for the personal mentoring I would receive from studying his life and ministry. He specifically encouraged me to consider studying Vines. That providential conversation initiated my pursuit of this proposed dissertation.

My next semester, I completed the seminar, “Biblical and Theological Principles of Evangelistic Ministry,” which too was led by professor Beougher. Knowing of my growing interest in Vines, Beougher allowed for my in-depth exploration of his theology and methodology as pertaining to evangelism. The key source for this paper was

a personal interview I conducted with Vines while visiting him in Canton, Georgia, where he currently resides. Several interviews, both personal and through email, have occurred since that initial meeting, but the heart of my research and thesis points back to this first trip to Georgia.

The following semester allowed me the privilege to take two seminars that helped to deepen my study of Vines' ministry. "Christology and Atonement," taught by Stephen Wellum, gave me the opportunity to write on Vines' view of both the nature and extent of atonement. The basis of this paper was an analysis of the theology found in his preaching. It was in this paper that I began to explore Vines' reasons for rejecting the doctrines of grace due to his perception of Calvinism as a threat to evangelistic fervor and effectiveness. Also this semester, I studied with professor Robert Vogel in his American Preaching seminar. Vogel permitted me to write a paper that traced the history of Vines' ministry and examined his expository sermon structure. The research I conducted from this seminar led to my initial examination of his evangelistic twist. The discussion that accompanied my paper's presentation heightened my interest in conducting further analysis upon this particular aspect of Vines' preaching.

My final semester of course work was highlighted by another seminar led by professor Vogel entitled "Hermeneutics for Preaching." Again, professor Vogel allowed me to focus my research on Vines' preaching. The paper I contributed to the seminar analyzed Vines' most recent series through the book of Acts and sought to understand the various nuances in Vines' prescriptive hermeneutic for the book. My research into these sermons unveiled timeless truths regarding the practice of evangelism that Acts prescribes for churches of all ages.

From a personal standpoint, Vines' appeal lies in his lifelong commitment to evangelism and expository preaching. As a co-pastor and later pastor of one of the largest, fastest-growing churches in North America, he maintained a firm commitment to the hard work and practice of personal evangelism in his own life. He refused to succumb

to the temptation of gaining larger baptismal numbers by way of gimmicks or questionable techniques, for his theology guided his methodology. He has committed his life to doing the hard work of preaching effective, expository sermons, believing the pulpit to be a main instrument used by God to help believers mature in their faith. He modeled for his congregation a life of impeccable integrity and holiness. Through his preaching, leadership, and personal example, he has done the work of an evangelist (2 Tim 4:5) and equipped his congregation to do the same (Eph 4:12).

As a result of my previous research and study, I desired to explore more fully the following issues relating to Vines' theology and practice, namely:

1. What experiences in Vines' own life shaped his unswerving commitment to being an evangelistic pastor? What enabled him to maintain his theological convictions while receiving his theological training in environments that were sympathetic to liberalism?
2. Who were the leading influences in Vines' life and ministry in regard to his commitment to evangelism? Are any of these influences' theology or methodology traceable in Vines' ministry?
3. What does Vines mean when he says that a person must pursue a biblical theology? Is what he calls "biblical theology" different from what is normally understood to be biblical theology? How does his pursuit of a biblical theology affect his systematic theology?
4. Why does Vines hold the theological conviction that Calvinism is a threat to evangelism?
5. How faithful is Vines to his use and practice of what he calls a sermon's evangelistic twist? How does Vines apply the twist to various Old and New Testament texts and genres? Does every biblical passage possess an evangelistic twist much like Bryan Chapell argues that every passage possesses one or more fallen condition foci?<sup>26</sup> Can Haddon Robinson's *Ladder of Abstraction* be applied to Vines' attempt to preach an evangelistic twist in conjunction with each of his expository sermons?<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 40-44.

<sup>27</sup>Haddon Robinson, "The Heresy of Application: It's When We're Applying Scripture that Error is Most Likely to Creep In," *Leadership* 18:4 (1997): 20-27.

6. While deciding upon an acceptable evangelistic twist, what are some principles that will guide its practices? What are some pitfalls that a preacher is wise to avoid?
7. Does Vines interpret Acts prescriptively or descriptively in regard to its application for the church's approach to evangelism? What are the parameters that Vines places on his hermeneutic that prevent it from straying into a misuse of the text? What are the truths that he uncovered in Acts that led his church to embrace a commitment to evangelism?

This dissertation attempts to address these specific issues within the framework of answering the overarching question, "What are the indispensable elements of his preaching and pastoral ministry that led to his evangelistic results?"

There is a reason why this question concerning Vines has not been previously addressed in scholarly treatment. His relatively recent retirement has not yet moved Vines out of the camp of contemporary figures and into Southern Baptists' minds as an historical figure. This question should be answered because research correlates the role of the pastor and church growth. Two of the leading church growth experts have observed that the pastor has a significant role in leading a church to grow. Peter Wagner, in *Your Church Can Grow*, articulates that "the most formidable obstacle to growth is a pastor who thinks negatively and who is pessimistic about growth opportunities in his community."<sup>28</sup> He later asserts that "in America, the primary catalytic factor for growth in a local church is the pastor."<sup>29</sup>

In *Effective Evangelistic Churches*, Rainer builds upon Wagner's work. He not only speaks of the significance of the role of the pastor, but in a chapter entitled "The Pulpit is Still Primary," he uses a survey analysis to assert the importance of a pastor's preaching. While further investigation of the interviewees may render a disparity in their theory and practice of preaching, Rainer asserts that 73.6% of the pastors of effective

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<sup>28</sup>Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1984), 48

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 55.

evangelistic churches state that they use the expository/textual model as the mainstay of their regular, weekly preaching style.<sup>30</sup>

I contend that Vines' preaching ministry exemplifies the findings of both Wagner and Rainer. God blessed each church that he pastored with significant conversion growth. As Duduit recognizes, it is reasonable to argue that none of the well known preachers of large churches of the Southern Baptist Convention were as faithful to preach expository sermons as Vines. His life and ministry embody the findings of these notable scholars in the field of church growth, thus pastors who have a heart for the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) are wise to emulate his practices.

A few delimitations to this pursuit of examining the aspects of Vines' evangelistic ministry must be noted. First, this dissertation makes no attempt to analyze and evaluate the unique co-pastorate model of leadership that harmoniously existed at First Baptist Church Jacksonville, Florida from the beginning of Vines' tenure until Homer Lindsay Jr.'s death in 2000. While this analysis would prove helpful and insightful due to the striking evangelistic fruitfulness of First Baptist, it would be impossible to offer this kind of analysis within the parameters of this dissertation.

Additionally, though in recent years Vines has publically and forcibly voiced concern for the rise of Reformed theology within the Southern Baptist Convention, this dissertation will not enter into a thorough dialogue for or against his position(s) related to Calvinism.<sup>31</sup> I opine that the tone and tenor of the debate tends to subdue the lessons gained from studying figures on either side of the issue, especially when the figure holds

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<sup>30</sup>Thom Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 58.

<sup>31</sup>Jerry Vines, "Baptist Battles: A Baptist and His Election," [on-line]; a video of the message preached at First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia in the evening service of 8 October 2006; accessed on 21 October 2006; available from <http://www.fbcw.org/media/mediacenter/player2.php?videourl=mms://mmslb.fbcwstream.org/fbcw/2006/fbcw1008062s256.wmv>; Internet. In this message, Vines most clearly articulates his critiques of the doctrines of grace.

to biblical inerrancy. Vines has definitely taken a public position against Calvinism. His correlation of Reformed theology and a diminished zeal for the Great Commission demands that his views be discussed in later chapters of this dissertation. Thus, one will find within this dissertation a discussion of these reasons along with a concise description of his soteriological underpinnings that weigh in to the Calvinism v. Non-Calvinism discussion. Yet a comprehensive evaluation of his critiques of the doctrines of grace will be left to another dissertation.

### **Methodology**

Research for this dissertation began with a thorough examination of the various available primary sources of Charles Jerry Vines. The James P. Boyce Centennial Library of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has a modest collection of Vines' books, but since making the decision to steer my coursework toward this dissertation topic, I have collected an extensive collection of Vines' writings, sermon manuscripts, and audio sermons. Inter-library loan also provided a means of securing scholarly resources pertinent to Vines not presently found in the library's holdings. Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives has offered great assistance to me in my research. Their archive, "Jerry Vines Papers," contains resources of Vines from his service as president of the Convention that are not available elsewhere. Additionally, their archive of Baptist Press articles, accessible on-line, has given me fast access to important documents of Vines' life and ministry.

I traveled to Canton, Georgia and spent considerable time with Vines in personal interviews. We interacted via email and have spoken on the phone on several occasions. I have also interacted with Vines' son who has assisted me in gathering requested sources out of Vines' own personal files that would have otherwise been unattainable.

The research departments of the Alabama, Georgia, and Florida State Conventions have been helpful in my efforts to trace the evangelistic fruitfulness that has followed Vines throughout his pastorates within these respected states. I am also thankful to the church librarians and bookstore workers of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, for their helpfulness in sending me audio messages of various sermons I have personally requested from them.

Additionally, the internet provided another location for helpful research. Vines has made many of his works available through his personal website, [www.jerryvines.com](http://www.jerryvines.com). I have gained membership status to a resource called “Vines Lines,” in which Vines blogs about a variety of ministerial and culture related matters in which he finds interest. Another website that has proven invaluable to me has been [www.sermonsearch.com](http://www.sermonsearch.com). This site offers fifteen hundred archived manuscripts of Vines’ sermons that are verbatim records of his preaching. Most of these sermons are dated, which makes them extremely useful for research projects of this nature. I have downloaded a collection of more than sixty sermons personally deemed most pertinent to Vines’ evangelistic contributions.

CHAPTER 2  
A BIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES JERRY VINES

**Introduction**

The thesis of this dissertation is that the preaching and pastoral ministry of Charles Jerry Vines is a model of evangelistic focus. A survey of his life and work is essential for this thesis to be substantiated. His reputation as an expository preacher and denominational leader is commonly known among contemporary evangelicals, but this survey seeks to determine whether or not he also maintained a commitment to personal evangelism and authentic Christian living. In this chapter, I give primary attention to a broad chronological reconstructing of his life. Subsequent chapters will give focus to particular aspects of his theology and preaching especially related to his evangelistic focus.

**Birth and Early Years**

Jerry Vines was born 22 September 1937 in a rural house in the small Georgia town of Carrollton in Carroll County, Georgia. His home life, consisting of two married parents and a younger sister, seemed idyllic for a future pastor. His father, Clarence Vines, was an outgoing salesman who provided for his family by driving a bread truck and selling such things as insurance and furniture.<sup>1</sup> Vines describes his mother, Ruby, as a quiet “devoted mother and homemaker.”<sup>2</sup> His sister, Brenda Young, remembers Vines

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<sup>1</sup>Nancy Smith, “A Faithful Soldier,” in *A Faithful Soldier*, ed. Nancy Smith and Stan Bethea (Jacksonville, FL: n.p., 2005), 12.

<sup>2</sup>Timothy A. Hight, “A Comparative Homiletical Analysis of Selected Southern Baptist Convention Presidents from 1979 through 1989” (Th.D. diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991), 14.

as a mischievous older sibling.<sup>3</sup>

Vines describes his family as a “normal, middle-class working family,” with one significant weakness: his family attended worship services regularly, but that seemed to be the extent of their church involvement. Timothy Hight explains: “At home there was little Bible reading and prayer prior to Vines realizing the call to preach.”<sup>4</sup> Yet, Vines did have an example of spiritual maturity in his maternal grandfather, W.O. Johnson. Vines recalls,

He was unique in his day in that he was a college graduate. He was a business man. He was called to preach later in life. He was self-taught in terms of the Scriptures and really taught me the pre-millennial return of Christ and had never read a book on the subject. His firm convictions, his unwavering stand I think certainly helped me to take strong stands.<sup>5</sup>

Along with “Grandpa Johnson,” Vines’ home church, The Tabernacle Baptist Church of Carrollton, Georgia, had a significant role in the spiritual growth and development of young Vines. Church members who sat close to him during worship services noticed him to be unusually attentive while the sermon was delivered. One of these members would later become his sixth grade school teacher. She recalled, “Even as a young boy, Jerry sat on the church’s second pew and took notes on the preacher’s sermons.”<sup>6</sup> A faithful grandfather and encouraging church were notable influences on young Vines. They each played a significant role in contributing to his biblical foundation. It would not be long before their combined efforts would lead to an early life

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<sup>3</sup>Smith, “A Faithful Soldier,” 12.

<sup>4</sup>Hight, “A Comparative Homiletical Analysis,” 15-16.

<sup>5</sup>Jerry Vines, quoted by Smith, “A Faithful Soldier,” 13.

<sup>6</sup>Mrs. Maxwell, quoted by Smith, “A Faithful Soldier,” 12-13.

conversion for Vines. That conversion would then be followed by his being called to the ministry as a young teenager.

### **Conversion Experience and Call to Ministry**

Vines became a Christian at an early age. He remembers, “I was nine, and it happened on a Sunday night. A friend came by the house and said he was going to join the church and wanted me to go to church with him. And so I did, and we went by the preacher’s office. He explained the plan of salvation.”<sup>7</sup> Later that night, during the Sunday evening service, Vines remembers falling under great conviction. He could not recall what the pastor, Ebb Kilpatrick, preached that night, but he said that he spoke with great compassion. Thus, during the invitation, Vines walked to the front of the church and professed Christ to be his Savior.<sup>8</sup>

From that day forward, Vines’ life was forever changed. He never experienced a period of youthful rebellion, but at the age of sixteen, he went through a season of great distress over the inconsistency of his Christian life and doubted the genuineness of his salvation. It was while he faced this season of discomfort that God called him into the ministry. Hight explains,

While praying one afternoon by his bed, the Holy Spirit assured him that he was indeed saved. He felt the Lord saying to him that His desire was for Jerry Vines to become a gospel preacher. Vines commented: “I yielded my life totally and completely at that very time to preach.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Jerry Vines, quoted by Smith, “A Faithful Soldier,” 13.

<sup>8</sup>Hight, “A Comparative Homiletical Analysis,” 15-16. In his dissertation, Vines gives his account of when Kilpatrick led him to Christ: “The writer was converted under the ministry of Rev. Kilpatrick in 1946. Though the writer cannot remember the text of the message, nor anything Brother Kilpatrick said, the reflection of the church lights in the tears upon his face as he preached the gospel of Jesus still warms the writer’s heart” (Jerry Vines, “A History of Tabernacle Baptist Church, Carrollton, Georgia, 1899-1973,” Th.D. Diss., Luther Rice Seminary, 1974, 82).

<sup>9</sup>Hight, “A Comparative Homiletical Analysis,” 16.

On that same afternoon, Vines went to inform his pastor, John T. Tippet, Jr., of his experience. Rather than give Vines the encouragement he sought, Tippet was unconvinced of the authenticity of his calling. Perhaps his incredulity was due to Vines' youthful age, but Vines' own admission of his shyness and timidity may have been the more likely reason. While writing about the Holy Spirit's role in giving supernatural gifts for Christian ministry, he admits:

When I was a junior in high school, I was given an aptitude test. It was standard procedure. One's natural inclinations and abilities were expected to bubble up from the depths of teenage insecurity. Hopefully, the information would point us in the direction of an appropriate career. My aptitude test produced interesting results. I should pursue something in the area of science or mathematics, according to the analysis. I should definitely avoid pursuing occupations requiring speaking or writing. At that time, I was not at all interested in writing or speaking. I almost failed junior English because I was required to give a five-minute speech in front of the class. Impossible, I thought! I was so shy, timid, and fearful that about all I could do was stand up there and giggle nervously. I was shy. I was nervous. And my dad has aspirations for me to become a surgeon. In the middle of this atmosphere, the Lord called me to preach his Word. I was the most stunned, surprised person of all when the Lord did this. Other people were certainly shocked. I knew I couldn't speak. I was well aware I did not have the natural abilities expected in a preacher. So I concluded that if I had been called to preach, God would have to give me the necessary abilities and equipment to carry out this call.<sup>10</sup>

Despite Vines' youthfulness, timidity, and lack of encouragement of his pastor, he pursued the preaching ministry with his parents' support. He went on to preach his first sermon on a rainy Wednesday night in Carrollton's Shady Grove Baptist Church.<sup>11</sup> "Absolutely scared to death," he preached his message and it lasted only fifteen to twenty minutes.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Jerry Vines, *Spirit Life: Experience the Power, Excitement, and Intimacy of God's Shaping Hand* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 98-99.

<sup>11</sup>J. Gerald Harris, "Jerry Vines Retires, Returns to Georgia," *The Christian Index* (February 2006) [on-line]; accessed 19 October 2006; available from <http://www.christianindex.org/1996.article>; Internet.

<sup>12</sup>Smith, "A Faithful Soldier," 14.

The pulpit was not the only time Vines struggled with fear in the ministry. He also experienced this emotion in his first attempts at personal evangelism. He remembers,

At the age of sixteen, when God had just called me to preach, I was the most timid boy in my church. I didn't know how to talk with people, and I was frightened at the prospect of trying to lead someone to Christ, but I knew the Lord had told me to witness. I was also aware that the Bible taught soul-winning. Somewhere there was fear in my heart.<sup>13</sup>

Vines felt the fear of rejection, yet as a young teenager he began to fulfill his call to personal evangelism. He had the privilege to lead two brothers to Christ who were living in a housing project in Carrollton, Georgia. After witnessing to these boys, Vines remembers, "When I led them to Christ, and then when I saw them baptized at the main church that Sunday night, it just absolutely put the fire in my bones. I mean, I found a joy there, that I have never known and that I wanted to experience from now on, that I've never really gotten away from."<sup>14</sup>

At this time in his ministry, he had only two books in his personal library; the Bible and George W. Truett's *A Quest for Souls*.<sup>15</sup> He had his Bible because he had nurtured a love for the Scriptures from a young age. Truett's work instructs on the work of the Holy Spirit and the importance of a pastor's constant encouragement of others to be involved in the area of evangelism. These two books focused his ministry on soul winning and preaching the Scriptures.<sup>16</sup> Vines nurtured and developed these commitments throughout his career.

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<sup>13</sup>Jerry Vines, *Wanted: Soul-Winners* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1989), 25.

<sup>14</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 25 August 2009.

<sup>15</sup>George W. Truett, *A Quest for Souls: Comprising All the Sermons Preached and Prayers Offered in a Series of Gospel Meetings Held in Fort Worth, Texas June 11-24, 1917* (Dallas, Texas Baptist Book House, 1917).

<sup>16</sup>Smith, "A Faithful Soldier," 14-15. Hight suggests that a study course commentary on Romans was a third book to have been a part of his library ("A Comparative Homiletical Analysis," 35).

### College, Ministry, and Marriage

After graduating from high school in 1955 at the age of eighteen, Vines decided to go to college. Following the advice of his pastor, he enrolled at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. He majored in Christianity and double minored in Greek and Philosophy. Vines greatly enjoyed his entire college experience. The academic atmosphere was invigorating to him. He developed a love for the biblical languages as he took his first courses in New Testament Greek. His classroom study almost immediately benefited his ministry as his knowledge of Greek became a useful tool that enhanced his weekly pastoral preaching.<sup>17</sup>

His time at Mercer also proved testing, for during these years he received a “thorough-going liberal education.”<sup>18</sup> The emphases that the faculty placed on higher criticism and the demythologizing of the Bible brought him to a time of crisis. His professors were insisting that the Bible is filled with fallacies and that many of the miracles of Scripture are not believable. This academic environment, which he found antagonistic to his personal convictions, challenged him to read. Edward J. Young’s *The Word is Truth*,<sup>19</sup> B. B. Warfield’s *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*,<sup>20</sup> and W. A. Criswell’s *These Issues We Must Face*<sup>21</sup> were greatly responsible for rescuing Vines from

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<sup>17</sup>Vines, email correspondence with author, 11 April 2011.

<sup>18</sup>Lester David Kitchens, “An Examination of the Degree of Effectiveness of Expository Preaching in Obtaining Evangelistic Results” (Th.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991), 168.

<sup>19</sup>Edward Y. Young, *Thy Word is Truth: Some Thoughts on the Biblical Doctrine of Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

<sup>20</sup>Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1948).

<sup>21</sup>Wallie A. Criswell, *These Issues We Must Face* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953).

liberalism's devaluing of his view of Scripture. Interestingly, the faculty seemed to have an inverse effect on Vines than what one might expect. Rather than weaken his conservative convictions, Mercer's academic environment spurred Vines to deepen his theological convictions.

In the pamphlet form of his 1987 Southern Baptist Convention sermon entitled, *A Baptist and His Bible*, Vines mentions a decision he made while being exposed to liberal theological teaching:

My days in college were great days. However, I had to make a decision about some of the things I was hearing concerning the Bible. I knew I would never be as scholarly or smart as those professors who were questioning the authority of the Bible. Thirty-one years ago now, as an eighteen year old boy, I decided to accept the Bible by faith and try to preach it.<sup>22</sup>

A critical reason Vines remembers his experience at Mercer as "great days," was because it was in this time that he cemented his doctrinal position of the inerrancy of Scripture. While corresponding with a concerned young pastor who wrote him during his first term as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Vines recollects: "You may be aware I graduated from Mercer University in Macon. It was there I first became aware of the inroads of liberal theology in our convention. At that time I made a commitment to the Lord to do what I could to turn things around."<sup>23</sup>

The same year that he began college, Vines was called to his first pastorate, The Centralhatchie Baptist Church in Franklin, Georgia. His experience in this first church began to teach him many lessons in what faithful pastoral ministry entails. His tenure there was less than eighteen months in length, but this first church, which averaged approximately sixty per week in Sunday School attendance, became a crucible to teach

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<sup>22</sup>Jerry Vines, *A Baptist and His Bible* (Jacksonville, FL: First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL, 1988), 13.

<sup>23</sup>Jerry Vines to Gregg Watson, letter, 29 June 1988, Jerry Vines Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville.

him of the necessity of sermon preparation.<sup>24</sup> In an interview with Michael Duduit, Vines admitted that this lesson was first learned through his feelings of failure:

I had a little church when I was eighteen, and I knew that was the way you were supposed to do it, so I took off in the Book of Romans! I had at that point in time, besides my Bible, one other book to my name, George Truett's *Quest for Souls*. Those were the sixteen most miserable weeks of my life! I preached a sermon a week on a chapter in the book of Romans, and at the end of that I definitely knew it was not for me.<sup>25</sup>

This failed attempt at expository preaching affected him deeply, so much that he spent the next ten years preaching topical sermons. Though he temporarily embraced a type of preaching that he would later claim was the poorest approach to preaching, he began to develop the discipline that sermon preparation requires.<sup>26</sup>

A second lesson he learned in his first pastorate was the value of praying for people to be saved. According to Hight,

During a revival meeting, Vines became very disturbed when no one had been saved following four days of morning and evening revival services. He spent all Wednesday night praying for the Thursday services. Again on Thursday morning, no one responded to the invitation. Vines went into the woods behind the church and prayed throughout the remainder of the day. During the time of invitation at the close of the service that evening, eight people came forward to make public professions of faith.<sup>27</sup>

It was through this revival that Vines learned of the necessity of praying for the lost. The coupling of prayer and evangelism is a discipline he would later teach to the churches he

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<sup>24</sup>Hight, "A Comparative Homiletical Analysis," 34. There is a slight discrepancy in the length of this first pastorate between Hight and Vines' account from his own recollection in *Spirit Life* that is quoted on page 26.

<sup>25</sup>Michael Duduit, *Preaching with Power: Dynamic Insights from Twenty Top Pastors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 198.

<sup>26</sup>Jerry Vines, *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 3. Hight suggests that the necessity of thorough sermon preparation is one of the two important lessons that the young pastor Vines learned in his first pastorate (Hight, "A Comparative Homiletical Analysis," 35).

<sup>27</sup> Hight, "A Comparative Homiletical Analysis," 35.

pastored. The joys and defeats of ministry at this church were experiences that he never forgot. They marked the remainder of his ministry.

Vines was never licensed in the ministry, but nearing the end of his days at Centralhatchie Baptist Church, on 5 August 1956, he was ordained to the gospel ministry. His ordination service took place on a Sunday afternoon in his home church of Tabernacle Baptist Church in Carrollton, Georgia. Tippet, who had reservations of Vines' calling at first, was now convinced of the authenticity of his calling and presided over the service. Tippet wisely sought involvement from Vines' grandfather, W.O. Johnson. The most memorable part of the service was the ordination prayer that Johnson delivered on the occasion. This "country evangelist" who played a significant role in Vines' conversion and spiritual growth, was struck by the momentous nature of his grandson's ordination.<sup>28</sup> Vines recalled: "I remember him breaking down in tears praying that I would be true to the Bible."<sup>29</sup>

Shortly thereafter, Vines accepted the call to be the pastor of the Bethesda Baptist Church in Bethesda, Georgia. Even though he was still preaching topical sermons, his four year tenure there from 1957-1960 helped him further develop as a pastor. While reminiscing of this particularly important time in his ministry, he writes of a particular way that he first learned and experienced what it is to be filled with the Spirit:

My first pastorate lasted sixteen months. I was still in my teens. As I began to minister and to preach in my second church, I became aware that my ministry was not as effective as I wanted it to be. I was faithful to proclaim God's word as best I could. There just didn't seem to be much power. You might say I had the words to the song, but I didn't have the music. Gratefully, the Lord brought wonderful Christians and pastors into my life in those early years. They helped me in many ways. Irving Phillips is one example. A college educated man, he served rural churches all his ministry. When he preached, there was an obvious power in his messages. It was not in the delivery, which was rapid-fire and high-g geared like a machine gun, but there was something else—a sense of power and blessing. I sought

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<sup>28</sup>Jerry Vines, email interview by author, 7 June 2010.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

out Brother Irving and explained my desire for power and effectiveness in preaching. The humble man of God explained to me the filling of the Holy Spirit. He showed me that only when we allow the Holy Spirit to preach through us can there be spiritual blessing produced. As a result of His simple teaching and encouragement, I asked the Holy Spirit to fill me as I preached and as I witnessed, and as I sought to live for Jesus among my people. I didn't hear any voices. I was not knocked over. No bells went off inside. But there was a conscious, refreshing new 'touch of the Lord' upon my ministry. This was the first time I was consciously filled with the Spirit.<sup>30</sup>

As Vines strove to be a minister filled with the Spirit, the years of this pastorate were marked by growth and personal accomplishment. He graduated from Mercer with his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1959. The average Sunday School attendance of Bethesda increased from 80 to 120. The church constructed two educational wings and remodeled the sanctuary.<sup>31</sup> But more significant to Vines than any of these accomplishments was what happened on the third Sunday of May 1960 when he met Janet Denney. It was homecoming Sunday, and Vines recalls,

Janet had come down with her family. There were some family connections in the area, and she walked in that Sunday. I was going to preach on *Jacobs's Ladder*, and Janet came in, and I fell off the ladder. She was the prettiest thing I'd ever seen in my life.<sup>32</sup>

He said, "I am going to marry that girl!" and he did.<sup>33</sup>

Jerry Vines and Janet Denny shared a courtship and engagement of less than five months. The busyness of their lives made it difficult for them to officially date. When they finally found an agreeable occasion to spend time together, Janet recalls, "He asked me to find a revival, if possible. This was before we ended up at a movie. I tried to locate a revival as I said I would. Luckily, I could not find one. You can say we only had one normal date." On another occasion, she remembered, "When we would go on a date,

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<sup>30</sup>Vines, *Spirit Life*, 61.

<sup>31</sup>Hight, "A Comparative Homiletical Analysis," 36.

<sup>32</sup>Smith, "A Faithful Soldier," 17.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

I would practice praying all week because I knew that we would pray on our date.”<sup>34</sup>

Janet felt most of their time together did not meet her criteria of a normal date, but that fact did not prevent their relationship from deepening. During the length of their courtship and engagement, Vines traveled one hundred miles every weekend to see her. Their first date was 29 July 1960. They were engaged on 16 August 1960, and they were married four months later on 17 December 1960.<sup>35</sup>

With a new wife, college diploma, pastoral experience, and his ordination, Vines was equipped and readied for his next phase of life. He sensed the need for further preparation for a career of pastoral ministry. He would soon look west to find the theological education that would satisfy this need for further preparation.

### **Seminary, Transitions, and Children**

Two weeks after marrying, Jerry and Janet Vines left Bethesda Baptist Church and moved to Louisiana to begin seminary at The New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Financial struggles and complications with Janet’s pregnancy led them to leave New Orleans and return to Georgia. He then accepted the call to his third pastorate at Second Baptist Church of Cedartown, Georgia.<sup>36</sup>

The personal challenges that Vines faced did not inhibit him from furthering his seminary education for long. The next several years were marked by the births of his children and short tenured pastorates. On 06 November 1961, while Vines served in Cedartown, Georgia, his first child, Joy, was born. Shortly thereafter, his growing family moved back to Carroll County when he was called to his fourth church, The Eureka Baptist Church. This pastorate was only one year in length. While he was there, 24 June

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<sup>34</sup>Janet Vines, personal interview by author, 25 August 2009.

<sup>35</sup>Smith, “A Faithful Soldier,” 17-18.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 18.

1963, Janet gave birth to twins: a daughter, Jodi, and a son, Jim. The following year, his growing family packed up and moved back to New Orleans so that Vines could finish his first seminary degree.<sup>37</sup>

Vines' days at New Orleans were especially helpful to him as he began to develop the theology and methodological practices that defined his approach to evangelism. Unlike the unsatisfying nature of his undergraduate experience invoked by the liberalism of Mercer University, he found seminary to be "much more conservative and satisfying," largely due to the emphasis that the faculty of New Orleans placed on the importance of evangelism.<sup>38</sup> It was in this formative culture that Vines was encouraged to be a soul winner. He decided he would never embrace a doctrinal position that hindered his passion for evangelism. He explained,

When I was in seminary, I made this decision, I knew that I had the invariable responsibility to witness. You can't read the New Testament without reaching this conclusion. So, I decided that everything I heard, or anything that I was considering about my position, if it in anyway lessened my desire to be a witness or cooled my passion for soul winning, I would not accept that position.<sup>39</sup>

Particularly influential to Vines' thinking and practice of evangelism was the relationship he developed with his evangelism professor, Gray Allison. Their relationship continued long after his days as a seminary student, and Vines considers him to be one of his greatest influences in his commitment to personal evangelism. During his years as President of the Southern Baptist Convention, Vines wrote Allison, "As you know, you

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Kitchens, "An Examination," 168-69. In a personal correspondence with Chuck Kelley, the present president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Vines expressed how his seminary experience increased his soul-winning fervor: "As you know, soul-winning fervor was greatly increased in my life during my days in New Orleans. I remember those days with a great deal of pleasure and gratitude." Jerry Vines to Chuck Kelley, letter, 3 July 1989, Jerry Vines Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville.

<sup>39</sup> Vines, personal interview by author 17 August 2006.

have had a tremendous impact upon my life. I will treasure forever the blessing you were to me during my seminary days and also in the days after.”<sup>40</sup>

Allison, who later became founder and president of Mid-America Seminary, was a professor whose own commitment to evangelism exemplified that which he taught to his students. He served as a pastor or staff member of four Louisiana Southern Baptist Churches, as Associate Director of Division of Evangelism for the Home Mission Board, and as an Evangelist for the Allison Evangelistic Association, Ruston, Louisiana, through which he conducted evangelistic meetings and Bible conferences across America. As Allison lectured on practical lessons of being a soul winner, advice such as that which follows surely left an impression upon young Vines:

Do remember we do not fail if we witness. Who wins people to Christ? The Holy Spirit! Nail that down—the Holy Spirit wins people to Christ. What are we supposed to do? Witness! Now, when do we fail? When we don’t witness! If we could ever get that straight, it would take care of a lot of our fears. We are not supposed to win them—that is the work of the Holy Spirit. We are to witness to them with the Word of God in love so that the Holy Spirit can take the Work of God and bring conviction and conversion. The tragedy is that a person goes out and tries one time, the one to whom he witnessed doesn’t trust the Lord, and the witness says: ‘I told you Gray Allison wasn’t telling me the truth. He said anybody who loves Jesus can bring others to know Him. And you see, I failed. I just can’t do it.’ He turns away discouraged and never tries again. But, you don’t fail if you witness. The Holy Spirit must win them—we are to witness. Oh, if we would only remember that!<sup>41</sup>

Vines heeded Allison’s instruction, for he not only preached the gospel from the pulpit on Sundays, but by way of visitation throughout the week, he carried the gospel to individuals living within the communities he pastored. Allison made sure his students witnessed. When asked about the experience of being in a classroom under Allison, Vines recalled,

On Fridays, many times, we would come into his evangelism class and he would say, “Now guys, who do you have on your heart who you are going to

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<sup>40</sup>Jerry Vines to Gray Allison, letter, 23 May 1989, Jerry Vines Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville.

<sup>41</sup>B. Gray Allison, *Winsome Words for Willing Witnesses* (n.p., 1970), 4-5.

witness to?” He would tell you he had, and then he would say, “Well, let’s just pray.” And then we would spend the whole class time in prayer. So the next week, when you got back, he’d ask, “Who did you share with this week?” So you know you would either have to do it or lie about it. So his classes and the example he showed as a professor, not just talking about it, but doing it.<sup>42</sup>

It was in Allison’s class that Vines was introduced to another one of his influences: the writings of Lee Rutland Scarborough. Scarborough’s life was marked by an expansive ministerial career. He was a pastor, highly sought-after evangelist, and in 1908, became the first to hold the “chair of fire,” as it was referred to by B.H. Carroll, the founding president of The Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. “The chair of fire,” was the expression that Carroll used to describe chair of the department of evangelism at Southwestern that Scarborough held.<sup>43</sup> From 1914-1945, Scarborough would go on to succeed Carroll as president of the institution, giving him a prominent role in Southern Baptist life. Eventually, Scarborough would rise to be the director of the “Seventy-five Million Campaign,” the seedbed for the Cooperative Program.<sup>44</sup> He published several books on evangelism, but it was *With Christ after the Lost* that Allison put on the class syllabus as assigned reading that impacted the young seminarian so deeply. Perhaps it was the following evangelistic ecclesiology that helped to shape Vines’ vision for the churches he would pastor thereafter:

There are certain factors necessarily essential to the construction of a perennially evangelistic church. Without these such a church cannot be maintained.

1. *A soul-winning leadership.* This in the modern church divides itself into four classes: (1) The pastor. He must be a soul winner if the church is to be soul-winning. The passion for lost men must absolutely master his ministry if he leads his church out into continuous and constructive evangelism. This passion must manifest itself in his *study, prayers, preaching, pastoral visitation, personal work,*

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<sup>42</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 25 August 2009.

<sup>43</sup>H. E. Dana, *Lee Rutland Scarborough* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1942), 80-91.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 92-135. The Seventy-five Million Campaign was launched during the 1919 meeting of the SBC in Atlanta, Georgia. It was, at that time, the most aggressive cooperative fundraising effort the denomination had ever seen. Commitments to evangelism and missions were the great motivators that led to its significant success.

*plans*, and entire church *programs*. He will carry a constant ‘heaviness and a great sorrow in his heart’ for unsaved men going to hell about him. He ought to make soul-winning the master note of his life. He will preach at least one evangelistic sermon each Sunday, hold at least one revival period in his church each year, hold other evangelistic services in other church and communities and constantly seek to win to Christ in public and private. (2) The *deacons* or other church officers. The church officers were meant to be the pastor’s spiritual cabinet in soul-winning. The qualifications of a deacon in Acts 6 demand that he be a soul-winner. The pastor should train the deacons in personal work. (3) The church-school *teachers*. Every Sunday-school teacher’s main qualification should be a passion and a purpose to win the pupils to life everlasting. (4) Other *church leaders* as officers in women’s and young people’s organizations. These should have the evangelistic spirit and seek its power. Thus these groups of church leaders, if evangelistic, give the soul-saving tone and temper to the life of the church.

2. An evangelistic *backing* in the church. The fires of soul-saving power must be fed and kindled in the life of the membership itself. In the homes of the people, in the prayer meetings, in all the religious gatherings and circles, there should burn the spiritual yearning for lost souls. Prayer groups should be formed, which meet constantly to plan and pray for souls and spiritual power.

3. The *music* of the church should be turned to evangelism and spiritual results. The song leaders themselves should be soul-winners and know the value of the Gospel in song. The choir can create evangelistic atmosphere or blight the chances to win men to Christ in the church life. Giddy or worldly song leaders or classic and unspiritual songs can prevent God’s saving power in church services. A spiritual and soul-winning choir is a contribution of unmeasured value to an evangelistic church.

4. The entire *life* and *program* of the church should be aimed at winning souls to Christ in salvation and building souls up in Him for winning others to Him. Under the leadership of the pastor, personal work hands will be organized, the membership will be led out in Gospel missions in crowded centers or neglected quarters, tent meetings, street corner Gospel services, parks, jails, hospitals—all these places will be utilized as opportunities to win men to the Savior.

5. In all this labor of love for men and Christ there should be an unflinching reliance on Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. The whole soul-saving movement must center on and gather about Jesus, the divine Lord and be carried on in the strength and wisdom of the divine Spirit.<sup>45</sup>

It was, in part, due to Scarborough’s influence that Vines later asserted, “The main business of the church is, of course, evangelism. That is, winning people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>L. R. Scarborough, *With Christ after the Lost* (Nashville: Sunday School Board, 1919), 149-51.

<sup>46</sup>Jerry Vines, “Building an Evangelistic Church” [on-line]; sermon manuscript of message delivered 12 January 2003; accessed 21 October 2006; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

In 1965, Vines accepted the pastorate for a second time at Second Baptist Church in Cedartown, Georgia. Determined to finish his education at New Orleans Seminary, for the next nine months, Vines boarded a train in Cedartown and rode all day Monday, studying for his next day's classes. After a week of attending classes, studying, and preparing his Sunday sermons, he boarded the train leaving New Orleans for Cedartown on Friday evening and arrived home in Cedartown early Saturday morning. He would then spend a few moments at home before devoting his Saturdays to visitation.

Despite the rigor of his schedule, Vines maintained the commitment to sharing his faith that was stoked in Allison's evangelism classes. He averaged 30 visits each Saturday, preached all day Sunday, and repeated the same schedule each week. All the while he managed a high A average at seminary as he led his church to baptize 110 people. In 1966, Vines graduated with his Bachelor of Divinity degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.<sup>47</sup>

After graduating from seminary, Vines accepted a pastorate to a fifth church, The First Baptist Church in Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. This pastorate lasted for approximately two years. It was here that Janet gave birth to a fourth child, a son named Jonathan, on 30 November 1967.<sup>48</sup> Also, Vines transitioned away from topical sermons and embraced the expository method. While speaking of this transition, Vines describes it as the second period of time in his preaching ministry:

The second ten years, I pursued what is known as the expository method. As I began to prepare expository sermons I made a marvelous discovery. My own ministry was completely changed and I became convinced of the value of expository preaching in the life of myself and in the life of the people to whom I preach.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Emir Caner and Ergun Caner, *The Sacred Trust: Sketches of the Southern Baptist Convention Presidents* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 178.

<sup>48</sup>Smith, "A Faithful Soldier," 19.

<sup>49</sup>Jerry Vines, "The Richness of Expository Preaching" (1976), audiocassette.

The transition from topical to expository preaching was not an easy, instantaneous occurrence. He explains,

My life and ministry were changed when I devoted myself to expository preaching. The first ten years of ministry, my sermons were generally topical in nature. The Lord blessed my meager efforts. My churches had some growth. People came to Christ. Then I actually stumbled upon the method of expository preaching. At a Bible conference I had the opportunity to hear Dr. Warren Wiersbe teach the Word. Although I was a seminary graduate and had been preaching for several years, I had never heard anyone take the Bible and expound it as did Dr. Wiersbe. My approach to preaching completely changed. I determined to begin using the expository method. All I had to go by was Dr. Wiersbe's example. I had never studied the expository method, I was aware of no books on the subject, and I had heard very little preaching of that kind. I just had the conviction in my heart that that was the kind of preaching the Lord wanted me to do. So I started. My efforts at the beginning were very poor and tentative. As I went along, however, I began to notice a change in my ministry. The people started bringing their Bibles; they showed more interest. I saw growth in the spiritual lives of my people. That convinced me of the value of expository preaching. The value to my own life is beyond my ability to place on printed page. Only eternity will reveal what the expository method of preaching has done in me. There is little doubt in my mind that the people themselves have been blessed through the preaching of expository sermons.<sup>50</sup>

When he moved from topical to expository sermons, he found the method of preaching that defined the remainder of his ministry. The formulation of his philosophy of ministry was mostly complete.

In 1969, Vines accepted the call as the pastor of West Rome Baptist Church in Rome, Georgia. Vines reflected on his years at West Rome and reminisced, "Those were good years."<sup>51</sup> The church grew in total membership from 1,159 in 1969 to 2,173 in 1974. It saw an average of over 122 annual baptisms during those years.<sup>52</sup> To accommodate the growth, Vines led the church through a capital building campaign for a new sanctuary that was completed during his pastorate in October of 1972. He hosted a

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<sup>50</sup>Jerry Vines, *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), xii-xiii.

<sup>51</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 17 August 2006.

<sup>52</sup>Statistics obtained in email to author 18 October 2006 from Kathleen Harris, Research Services, Georgia Baptist Convention.

radio program called, “What’s The Good Word?” He birthed a deaf ministry, a bus ministry, a children’s church service, and a church bookstore. He served as the chaplain for the West Rome High School Chieftains football team.<sup>53</sup> These ministry efforts gave him multiple opportunities to minister within the community. Along with these efforts, he maintained the necessary commitment to sermon preparation. David Allen, Dean of the School of Theology and Professor of Preaching at The Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, remembers,

When Dr. Vines came to West Rome Baptist Church as pastor, I was 11 years old. I remember well his preaching during those years. I kept notebooks of his sermons. His preaching was characterized by passion both for the unsaved as well as for Christians in the church. Through his preaching, God marked me for a lifetime of ministry.<sup>54</sup>

As Vines fulfilled his calling as pastor of West Rome Baptist Church, he also attended Luther Rice Seminary in Jacksonville, Florida and was awarded the Doctor of Theology degree in 1974.<sup>55</sup>

Vines’ first of two pastorates of West Rome Baptist Church was marked by his coming to maturity as a preacher. To this point in his ministry, these years exhibited the most consistent and extensive church growth of his pastoral ministry. He attributed the church’s growth to the hunger of the people for the Word of God and their deep desire to reach their community with the message of the gospel. Hight correlates the growth and fruitfulness of the people of West Rome Baptist to Vines’ completing the transition of his preaching ministry to a purely expositional method of sermon delivery. Hight concludes,

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<sup>53</sup>Smith, “A Faithful Soldier,” 19.

<sup>54</sup>David Allen, “Memories,” in *A Faithful Soldier*, ed. Nancy Smith and Stan Bethea (Jacksonville: n.p., 2005), 88.

<sup>55</sup>Luther Rice Seminary relocated and is presently located in Lithonia, Georgia.

“This undoubtedly was an influential factor in the growth of the West Rome Baptist Church.”<sup>56</sup>

### **The Ebb and Flow of Being a Pastor and Becoming a Denominational Leader**

On 1 September 1974 Vines left West Rome Baptist Church and accepted the call to become the pastor of the significantly larger Dauphin Way Baptist Church in Mobile, Alabama. His move to Alabama would soon mark the beginning of his growing influence at the State Convention and national Convention levels. The pastor search committee of Dauphin Way Baptist Church heavily considered Vines, in large part, due to the letter they received from Dr. Homer Lindsay Sr, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida. An excerpt from the letter from the church’s search committee to the congregation announcing Vines’ selection reads:

The Pulpit Committee has been busy seeking to find God’s man to lead Dauphin Way. Many trips had been made to many churches to hear prospective candidates. In early June, the committee received a letter from Dr. Homer Lindsay, Sr., Pastor Emeritus of the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Florida. Dr. Lindsay recommended a young preacher who was pastor of the West Rome Baptist Church in Rome, Georgia, Dr. Charles Jerry Vines.<sup>57</sup>

Vines set the pace for his commitment to evangelism before his pastorate began. He wrote the pulpit committee a letter that he asked to be shared with the entire church. A portion of it read:

The preaching of the word of God will be central in the ministry of the pastor. The whole Word of God will be preached without fear or favor. Visitation to win the lost will be given top priority in the activities of the church. The goal will be to evangelize the city of Mobile for Jesus Christ.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Hight, “A Comparative Homiletical Analysis,” 37.

<sup>57</sup>Quoted by Smith, “A Faithful Soldier,” 20. This excerpt evinces the intimate relationship that both Lindsays shared for Vines several years before the co-pastorate of Vines and Lindsay Jr. began at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

He continued to persist in the areas of ministry he had honed throughout his previous years of experience. He remained fully committed to preaching expository sermons. He led the church by example in his commitment to weekly evangelistic visitation. Under Vines' leadership, Dauphin Way led the Alabama Baptist Convention in baptisms throughout his pastoral tenure. The church averaged just over 250 baptisms per year and grew in total membership from 6,595 members in 1974 to 7,832 members in 1979.<sup>59</sup>

Although the statistics attest to notable church growth, the years at Dauphin Way were hard years. Vines reflects, "We've had wonderful churches, but then we've had times in churches that were challenging. Those are the times when you grow the most."<sup>60</sup> Vines would likely speak to the latter when describing these years of ministry in Mobile. Betty Bollson Vinson, a member of the church at the time of Vines' pastorate, recalls some of the changes that he implemented.<sup>61</sup> She speaks of his refusal to wear a traditionally dark suit in the pulpit. He felt they were "a thing of the past."<sup>62</sup> He brought a different style of worship to the church and believed in a service that was informal and flexible.

Perhaps these were the reasons why Vines' leadership was met with opposition at the church. Perhaps it was a new training program that led participants through verse-by-verse exposition that Vines gave time and attention to while others felt his energies were better spent elsewhere. No matter the reason, these days were difficult for Vines and

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<sup>59</sup>Statistics obtained in email to author, 13 October 2006, from Mickey W. Crawford, Statistical Programmer, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

<sup>60</sup>Quoted by Smith, "A Faithful Soldier," 21.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

his family, but it proved to be a time of significant growth and maturation. He remembers:

Several years ago the Lord gave me a very difficult assignment. I was sent by the Lord to serve in an area where an ocean of problems existed. I soon became keenly aware that I was totally unequipped to minister effectively. I sought the help of the Holy Spirit in this difficult ministry, and I was led to 2 Timothy 1:7: “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.” It was exactly what I needed—power for my difficult assignment. I needed love for people who were often unloving. I also needed a sound mind so I would have God’s wisdom to make right decisions. The verse became my daily prayer. Each morning after reading my Bible, I prayed and asked God for power, love, and wisdom.<sup>63</sup>

Janet Vines remembers the difficulties that came with this particular season of ministry. Smith writes: “Janet never had a peaceful feeling about being there, yet she knew it was God’s will for her husband.”<sup>64</sup> But Janet also professes that “nevertheless, Jerry did some of his best preaching there.”<sup>65</sup>

What Janet began to notice was also observed by others in the Alabama Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention. He never had aspirations to become a denominational leader, but his growing reputation as an evangelistic pastor led to his election as president of the 1975 Alabama Pastor’s Conference. After Vines preached a sermon entitled, “Our Ascended Lord,” at the 1976 Alabama State Evangelism Conference, the popularity of the sermon led to a swelling of support for him at the national Convention level. Without being forewarned, he was nominated from the floor to serve as the 1976-1977 Southern Baptist Pastor’s Conference president. What follows is Vines’ recollection of the sequence of events that propelled him into his unexpected spotlight of denominational leadership:

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<sup>63</sup>Vines, *Spirit Life*, 87.

<sup>64</sup>Quoted by Smith, “A Faithful Soldier,” 21.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*

I never had any aspirations to be a leader in the denomination. I preached a sermon in Mobile while I was the pastor at Dauphin Way at the State Evangelism Conference, a sermon on the ascended Lord, and I never dreamed it would happen, it just went like wildfire, it really did, and before I knew it, the next thing I knew I was asked to preach it at the Southern Baptist Pastor's Conference in Norfolk, I think it was. And I was elected president of the SBC Pastors Conference, it totally surprised me. I didn't even know that guy was going to nominate me. He didn't get my permission, he just did it. And I became the president, then all of the sudden, I became a major figure, and God was growing our church, but it was never a plan, I never intended for that to happen, God just did it.<sup>66</sup>

Vines now had a platform to be a catalyst for change in the Southern Baptist Convention. He would soon have a voice to address the concerns of liberalism from his college experience at Mercer University. He ran for president of the Southern Baptist Convention that convened in Kansas City in 1977, but was defeated by a significant margin by Jimmy Allen when he and fellow conservative Richard Jackson split the conservative votes.<sup>67</sup> It would be eleven years before Vines would be voted to serve as President of the Southern Baptist Convention. Yet, for the next quarter century, Vines would be a perennial Pastor's Conference speaker and influence the convention by serving on a variety of committee assignments. His service would help to cement the Conservative Resurgence.

In 1980, Vines and his family left Dauphin Way Baptist Church to accept a second pastorate at West Rome Baptist Church in Rome, Georgia. For the second time in his career, Vines was called back to a church where he had previously served. The impetus for this move was that the church had fallen into a state of division. A church split appeared inevitable. The effectiveness of Vines' previous pastorate of the church led many within the congregation to believe he was the only one who could lead the congregation back to a state of harmony and unity. Hight records: "Vines himself became

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<sup>66</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 25 August 2009.

<sup>67</sup>Paul Pressler, *A Hill on Which to Die* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 97.

convinced of this and, thus, began at West Rome a ministry of reconciliation.”<sup>68</sup>

This second pastorate lasted for only two years. Despite the difficulty of the assignment, the church experienced significant conversion growth and Hight reports that by the time of his leaving, “the church had come together again.”<sup>69</sup> During this short pastorate, 282 people were baptized. By the time of Vines’ departure, the church membership totaled 2,992 persons.<sup>70</sup>

### **A Season of Influence**

The ending of Vines’ second stint as pastor of West Rome Baptist Church concluded his pastoral ministry in the state of Georgia. Homer G. Lindsay Jr., the pastor of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, contacted Vines in the early part of 1981 with an unusual offer: Lindsay asked him to join him as co-pastor. At first, Vines did not take Lindsay’s offer seriously.<sup>71</sup> The two were long-time friends and their families had vacationed together many times, but the offer was one that Vines later admitted “should not be the model for churches.”<sup>72</sup> When Lindsay called him again one year later, he then knew that the matter needed to be seriously considered. Vines studied the New Testament to seek biblical precedent for such an arrangement of church leadership. When he concluded that the arrangement was biblical, he sensed that God was calling him to join with Lindsay.<sup>73</sup> In 1982, after much prayer, he accepted the call to become the church’s

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<sup>68</sup>Hight, “A Comparative Homiletical Analysis,” 38.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 38-39. He admits that at first, he did not take Lindsay seriously, thinking Lindsay’s offer to be a humorous proposition.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 38-39. Hight explains Vines’ conclusion of the biblical precedence for the co-pastorate: “Vines undertook a study of the New Testament to determine a biblical

co-pastor.

### **Decade of the 1980s**

Vines stepped out of a pastorate marked by division into a church with a heritage of stability and growth. Homer Lindsay, Sr., became First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida's pastor in 1940. Then, from 1969-1975 Lindsay, Jr. joined his father and the two served as co-pastors until the elder Lindsay retired in 1975. In the years Lindsay Jr. served as the church's only pastor, the church had almost tripled its membership from 4,500 to 13,200. The average Sunday School attendance had grown from 2,000 to over 4,700 in that same time period.<sup>74</sup> Vines later stated that Lindsay was the strongest "church growth man" he had ever known.<sup>75</sup> When he joined Lindsay, the church was already vibrant and strong. Their partnership would continue until Lindsay's death in February 2000. Despite Vines' belief that their co-pastor model was not a reproducible pattern for most churches, its success was partly because, according to Hight, "He and Lindsay possessed personalities 'uniquely suited' to such a ministry."<sup>76</sup>

From 1982-1989, the already growing First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida began to grow even faster. With Vines and Lindsay as co-pastors, during these years it recorded 7,727 baptisms. It averaged 966 baptisms per year. It grew from averaging 4,747 in Sunday School to its highest annual average of 6,720 in 1988. In 1989 the church peaked in its Sunday School growth, averaging 6,272 in attendance, though

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precedent for such an endeavor. . . .He proceeded to list the advantages and disadvantages of such an arrangement, meticulously comparing the two."

<sup>74</sup>Hight, "A Comparative Homiletical Analysis," 39.

<sup>75</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview with author 17 August 2006.

<sup>76</sup>Hight, "A Comparative Homiletical Analysis," 39.

total membership continued to grow from 10,117 in 1982 to 15,050 members in 1999.<sup>77</sup> Several successful outreach ministries contributed to the church's growth. At the foundation of the church's organization of these ministries was a vibrant Sunday School.

A church ministries notebook provided by First Baptist explains that both pastors "use the Sunday School to do the work of the church."<sup>78</sup> The task of Sunday School was "total New Testament evangelism," which is "winning a city for Christ" by "bringing people face to face with the teachings of Christ, winning them, baptizing them and making disciples."<sup>79</sup> The organization of the Sunday School was designed for the individual. The notebook explains:

Every Adult Bible Class is organized according to age and geographic area. The Senior High's are grouped according to the high schools. No one is excluded. Every age-group is included. Every life-style is represented. Every geographic area assigned. You are important.<sup>80</sup>

Vines and Lindsay led the Sunday School by example. They served as co-directors of the division of Sunday School for men born between the years 1919-1960.<sup>81</sup> They remained consistently involved in the church's weekly visitation ministry. Vines admitted that when he served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, or when he was involved in the Conservative Resurgence, there were times he could not be in Jacksonville, Florida during the week to participate in weekly visitation and outreach. But he continues, "Those times I was there, I had a commitment to it and I didn't let anything

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<sup>77</sup>Statistics obtained in email to author 11 October 2006 from Rachel D. Tracey, Department Secretary for Information Support Services, Florida Baptist Convention.

<sup>78</sup>Homar G. Lindsay, Jr. and Jerry Vines, *The Miracle of Downtown Jacksonville* (Jacksonville, FL: n.p.), SS-2.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., SS-6.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., SS-7.

come in its way.”<sup>82</sup> Calvin Carr, who served as a youth minister at First Baptist Jacksonville, remembers:

Dr. Vines modeled a heart for evangelism. He went visiting every week. He would ask departments where they could get prospects to visit. He would go every week and make those visits, even during the time when he was president of the SBC and he was very busy.<sup>83</sup>

In response to both co-pastors’ servant leadership, over 2,000 First Baptist members constituted the Sunday School Leadership. The weekly visitation program regularly averaged over 1,000 participants.<sup>84</sup> A telephone ministry that was begun in 1986 to contact chronic absentees and prospects employed twenty-five paid part-time callers who each worked for thirteen weekly hours making calls from thirty of First Baptist’s telephones. With this method, six times as many contacts were made through the phone than were made during regular weekly visitation.<sup>85</sup> Due in large part to these efforts, by November 1989, First Baptist had over 15,000 enrolled in Sunday School.<sup>86</sup>

It was also during this decade that Vines made two significant contributions to the field of preaching. His sixteen years of experience in his approach to the expository preaching method led to his writing two works to instruct preachers how to prepare and deliver expository sermons. In 1985 Moody Press published his first volume on preaching that explains Vines’ approach to preparing expository sermons, titled *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation*.<sup>87</sup> The next year, again through Moody Press, he

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<sup>82</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 26 August 2009.

<sup>83</sup>Calvin Carr, personal interview by author, 14 April 2010.

<sup>84</sup>Hight, “A Comparative Homiletical Analysis,” 39-40.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>86</sup>Lindsay and Vines, *The Miracle*, SS-2-SS-6.

<sup>87</sup>Vines, *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation*.

published his second volume on preaching titled, *A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery*.<sup>88</sup> This work, as evidenced by the title, offers instruction as to how to deliver expository sermons.

While pastoring and writing, Vines continued to remain heavily involved in a movement that was changing the doctrinal and evangelistic face of the Southern Baptist Convention. His previous role as President of the 1977 Pastor's Conference moved him into the position of being one of the main leaders in the Conservative Resurgence. The rallying point from the movement's conception was the doctrinal position of the inerrancy of the Bible, and Vines had established himself as one of inerrancy's leading advocates and spokespersons.

Steered mainly by the leadership of Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler, the Conservative Resurgence was officially launched at the 1979 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention that convened in Houston, Texas. On 6 June 1979 Pressler circulated a letter that recommended potential candidates for president: "The issue of candidates is not yet resolved. For the Convention presidency, the three possible strong candidates committed to Biblical inerrancy are Adrian Rogers, Jerry Vines, and Bailey Smith."<sup>89</sup> Vines did not become the conservative candidate that year, for that position was given to the president Adrian Rogers. Yet, Vines did have a role to play in helping Rogers decide to run for the Convention Presidency. According to Rogers,

Monday evening Joyce and I went out. . . .and tried to have a quiet dinner by ourselves. We got in just about 11:30 in the hotel and when we were coming in, I met Paige [Patterson] and Jerry Vines. They said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I am not going to allow myself to be placed in nomination." They said "No, we need you." So they came up to our room, and Paige and Jerry and myself knelt

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<sup>88</sup>Jerry Vines, *A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986).

<sup>89</sup>Paul Pressler, quoted by Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 95.

on the floor and prayed.<sup>90</sup>

The next morning, Homer Lindsay, Jr. nominated Rogers to be the Convention president. With his victory, the Conservative Resurgence had begun.

As the Conservative Resurgence continued into the 1980s, Vines' leadership in the movement continued. In 1984, he nominated Charles Stanley as a candidate for the Convention presidency, which Stanley won on the first ballot.<sup>91</sup> Vines contributed to the efforts of the Peace Committee that convened from August 1985-June 1988.<sup>92</sup> This committee worked to resolve theological and political tensions between conservatives and moderates within the Convention. Rather than seek compromise, it propelled the Convention toward conservatism. Its work gave impetus to the "Glorieta Statement," a document produced and signed by the presidents of all six of the Convention's seminaries defining the doctrinal convictions they promised to never compromise.<sup>93</sup> While these contributions are noteworthy, perhaps the greatest contributions that can be directly attributed to Vines were the two sermons he preached at the Convention and his leadership as Convention President in 1988-1989.

The most significant sermon of Vines' career may also be the most historic sermon of the Conservative Resurgence. It was the message he delivered as the 1987 Convention sermon called, "A Baptist and His Bible." Ironically, a helpful source that speaks to the importance of this sermon is *In the Name of the Father: The Rhetoric of the New Southern Baptist Convention*, written by Carl L. Kell and R. Raymond Camp.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 142.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 152-60.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 162-63.

<sup>94</sup>Carl L. Kell and L. Raymond Camp, *In the Name of the Father: The Rhetoric of the New Southern Baptist Convention* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999).

These authors give an analysis of the message from a moderate perspective. Kenneth Chafin, a moderate and former professor of Southern Seminary, communicates the thesis for the book in the foreword: “The thesis of this book is true, and it saddens me. The authors rightly see the inerrancy controversy—the position that holds the Bible is literally true and without error on any subject—in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) as the best expression in the twentieth century of the power of the spoken word to change the nature and character of a major Protestant denomination.”<sup>95</sup> In this book, the authors conclude that Vines’ message is the “finest sermonic exposition of the loyalist movement.”<sup>96</sup> Their analysis of the sermon is as follows:

Vines’ sermon “A Baptist and His Bible” is the finest national statement on biblical inerrancy we found during our research for this study. A gifted orator of the New South School of Southern Baptist preachers, Vines was the perfect combination of country preacher and gifted scholar of the Bible. Adrian Rogers, president of the SBC in 1987 and regarded as the quintessential orator of Southern Baptist life, introduced Vines. In all of the hours of videotape and transcript involving Adrian Rogers, he was never so humbled nor excited when referring to others on the podium. Vines was, for Rogers, “The best combination of scholar and country preacher in Southern Baptist life today.”

Jerry Vines did not disappoint, as he has always been a gifted speaker and an ardent student of the Bible’s native languages—Hebrew and Greek. In the words of southern folklore, “If you don’t want to believe the man, don’t listen to him.” In a firm, memorized textual speaking style, Vines riveted the audience to their seats for nearly forty minutes. In his sermon, Vines established the Apostle Paul as the Scripture’s finest apologist, its prime defender, and its best teacher. Furthermore, Vines reinforced the long-held concept that the Bible is its own best footnote. Early in the sermon, Vines affirmed that the “purpose of the Bible is to lead men to Jesus Christ.” Because of the Bible’s internal purpose, Vines claimed that “Baptists get concerned when there is any hint of attack upon it. We get upset when there is any undermining of its authority, questioning its reliability or denying its accuracy.”

Setting a tone heard in national convention sermons of the early 1980s and heard down through the years in SBC presidential preaching, Vines proposed, “How can anyone say we must trust our soul to Christ for eternity, then turn around and try to obliterate the very document which tells us about him?” Vines moved quickly to warn his listeners regarding his particular brand of the “other”—destructive criticism. For the better part of the middle section of the sermon, Vines hammered away at the historical-critical method that “destroys the scripture piece by piece.” For the remainder of the sermon, Vines urged his hearers to reject the criticism of

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid., xi.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 167.

the Bible and, in turn, believe it in regard to all of life's needs. It is the "Bible...and It will get you home."

The assembled thousands rose to acclaim the great sermon and its humble voice. The power of a literate, prepared text and clear purpose, combined with Jerry Vines' folksy rhetorical style, provided a defining moment in raising Southern Baptist preaching to a new level. The messengers roared their approval of this finely crafted sermon, delivered by a gifted speaker to an audience eager for a fresh breath of God's Word. This sermon was a high rhetorical watermark in Southern Baptist preaching.

The Southern Baptist Convention has had its great rhetorical events in recent years, but when Vines strode to the plexiglass pulpit, acknowledged his audience, paused, and then spoke his memorized line to the gallery—"In beautiful human language resplendent with divine revelation Paul sets before us the Bible's doctrine concerning itself"—everyone present knew this sermon was special.<sup>97</sup>

As attested by the analysis above, "A Baptist and His Bible" substantially strengthened the support of the conservative side of the inerrancy debate. Shortly after Vines delivered the sermon, First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida mass produced a manuscript of the sermon and included a personal letter from Homer Lindsay, Jr. affirming the reasons for the sermon's effectiveness.

I truly believe this message came from God himself. I know Jerry spent many hours praying and seeking the Lord's mind and God's direction in the matter of this one single sermon. He actually spent over four months in preparing this one message. He took very seriously the opportunity of speaking for God before so many men of God.<sup>98</sup>

Lindsay's letter and Vines' manuscript were circulated nation-wide. Vines wrote in the booklet's preface: "My hope is that this sermon be used of the Lord to create confidence in God's supernaturally, verbally, totally inspired Word. I also earnestly hope that it will be used to resolve some of the controversy among us concerning the Bible's

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 56-57.

<sup>98</sup>Homer Lindsay, letter included with a mass-mailing of *A Baptist and His Bible*, 14 March 1988.

inspiration.”<sup>99</sup> Baptist Press reported that this effort was influential in organizing widespread support for Vines’ run for president at the 1988 Las Vegas convention.<sup>100</sup>

A second sermon Vines preached that helped to garner support for conservatives in the inerrancy debate was the President’s Address of the 1990 Southern Baptist Convention entitled, “The Glory of God.” Kell and Camp affirm this sermon as “a marvel of rhetorical pulpiteering concerning His perfect Word.” They continue by asserting that the years from 1985-1990 were marked by the “finest array of Convention presidents at their rhetorical best.” By the end of “The Glory of God,” they assess, the fate of those on the moderate side of the inerrancy debate was sealed.<sup>101</sup>

Vines also contributed to the Conservative Resurgence through serving as a two-term president for the Convention from 1988-1989. Pressler asserts that since Vines was the only one of the three leading prospects considered in 1979 who had not been elected, his service as president came later than many Southern Baptists anticipated. This assertion is one worthy of consideration, especially when one ponders Pressler’s observation that “perhaps no leader has ever had greater rapport with pastors of small churches than Jerry Vines. He was always available to everyone, and conservatives had been awaiting the time that he felt God’s leadership to be nominated.”<sup>102</sup>

Vines sensed God’s call to serve the Convention as its leader as he finished preaching the convention sermon, “A Baptist and His Bible.” Charles Stanley was seated on the platform as the present Convention president. As Vines preached, Stanley says,

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<sup>99</sup>Vines, *A Baptist and His Bible*.

<sup>100</sup>Greg Warner, “Courageous Conservative Needed to Continue SBC Correction: Vines,” *Baptist Press*, 12 May 1988, 3-4.

<sup>101</sup>Kell and Camp, *In the Name of the Father*, 169-70.

<sup>102</sup>Pressler, *A Hill*, 143.

“God spoke to me very clearly that Jerry was to be the next president.”<sup>103</sup> Vines remembers that after he finished his sermon, Stanley whispered in his ear that God had told him he would be the next year’s president, and Vines admitted that it “scared him to death.”<sup>104</sup> His greatest challenge the next year came from Richard Jackson, a pastor of the 18,000 member North Phoenix Baptist Church who Vines had faced in a previous run for Convention president in 1977. Only now, Jackson was considered to be the candidate who was sympathetic to the concerns of the moderates. There were conservatives that feared Vines’ reputation was regionally limited to the Southeast and that these fears would be realized by his inability to defeat Jackson. Yet Vines was not discouraged by the pessimism. He refused to speak to any theological differences that separated him from Jackson. He promised that if elected, he hoped his presidency would be a transitional time for Southern Baptists to put a decade of controversy behind them. He stated, “I would like to be the president who could call our denomination to a renewed commitment to winning the lost to Christ.”<sup>105</sup> By a narrow margin of less than 700 votes, Vines was given the opportunity.<sup>106</sup>

His election moved the Conservative Resurgence into a new phase. As Sutton explains, the makeup of the denomination’s leadership had undergone significant transformation. Conservative leadership had accumulated on the boards and agencies, and the time was finally at hand for the Convention to be mobilized in its unified conservatism. The themes of his presidency, according to Sutton, were “first and foremost, the mandate to be faithful to Scripture. Second, he encouraged all Southern

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<sup>103</sup>Charles Stanley, quoted by Smith, “A Faithful Soldier,” 24.

<sup>104</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 26 August 2009.

<sup>105</sup>Warner, “Courageous Conservative Needed,” 4.

<sup>106</sup>Pressler, *A Hill*, 141.

Baptists to give and give well. His heartbeat, however, was in winning souls—a theme that heretofore had been dormant among Southern Baptists. At the same time, Vines was very strong in his insistence that our convictions must shape our future.”<sup>107</sup>

Vines often encouraged a renewed zeal for evangelism during his presidency. For instance, when he addressed the trustees of the Sunday School Board, he urged them to be personal witnesses. He stated, “Our priority assignment is to lead people to Jesus Christ. It is a disgrace that some of us are so well trained and win so few to Jesus. The bottom line for Southern Baptists must be telling people about Jesus.”<sup>108</sup> When dealing with the concern of many Southern Baptists that Las Vegas would be the site of the Convention’s 1989 annual meeting, Vines suggested that the decision would provide an opportunity to put a renewed commitment to evangelism into practice. He urged messengers to conduct crusades, street services, and door-to-door witnessing—“all the things Baptists know how to do so well.”<sup>109</sup>

A controversy that Vines dealt with was a growing concern that declining numbers for Cooperative Program giving indicated that the controversy over inerrancy was causing the convention to disintegrate. Though his response seemed to undercut the conservative position that moderate theology injured the Convention’s evangelistic fervor, Vines still turned the controversy towards evangelism. He answered, “The strength of the denomination is in its commitment by both moderates and conservatives to winning the lost to saving faith in Christ.”<sup>110</sup> While explaining the importance of inerrancy to reporters at the close of the annual meeting of the State Convention of

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<sup>107</sup>Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation*, 190.

<sup>108</sup>Jerry Vines, quoted by Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation*, 194.

<sup>109</sup>Warner, “Courageous Conservative Needed,” 4.

<sup>110</sup>Jerry Vines, quoted by Toby Druin, “SBC Not ‘Disintegrating,’ Says Jerry Vines,” *Baptist Standard*, 3.

Baptists in Ohio, he stated, “My emphasis as president is to try to set a tone and atmosphere which will remind Southern Baptists of our priority assignment. Everywhere I go I’m just trying to refocus our attention on the priority.”<sup>111</sup>

A priority that Vines stressed throughout his presidency was to tell people about Jesus. When addressing the Executive Committee, he called for every facet of denominational life to help churches “maintain our soul-winning assignment.”<sup>112</sup> The emphasis of his first term was “urging Southern Baptists to increase personal witnessing” and his second term’s emphasis was on “building soul-winning churches.”<sup>113</sup> He strove to model the commitment to evangelism that he exhorted Southern Baptists to embrace. On one occasion in his presidency, he corresponded with Leavell Landrum, then the President of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and shared with him of his most recent evangelistic efforts:

I appreciate your commitment to pray for me. I am glad you are joining me in a commitment to soul-winning. Yesterday, I had the joy of leading a cab driver in Washington, D.C., to the Lord Jesus. It’s thrilling when the Lord gives us an ‘along the way.’ Tonight, I am going out to visit a young couple that needs the Lord. I pray I will be able to win them to Christ.<sup>114</sup>

In both word and practice, the primary conviction that Vines conveyed and perpetuated throughout his presidency was a firm commitment to soul winning.

Vines’ presidency also afforded him unique opportunities as a Southern Baptist statesman. The years of his terms allowed him access to two United States presidents. Nearing the end of Ronald Reagan’s second term, Vines and his wife Janet were invited

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<sup>111</sup>Debra Mason, “Southern Baptist Leader Preaches Jesus, Not Politics,” *Columbus Dispatch* 12 November 1988, A-1.

<sup>112</sup>Robert O’Brien, “Vines Urges Accountability, Emphasis on Evangelism,” *Baptist Press*, 9 September 1989, 2.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>114</sup>Jerry Vines to Landrum Leavell, letter, 12 July 1988, Jerry Vines Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville.

to attend The State Dinner. For two hours, Vines conversed with the President. In a thank-you note written to the President on 8 November 1988, Vines writes:

I was especially grateful, President Reagan, for the opportunity to sit at your table and have conversation with you. I want to reiterate in my letter what I said to you personally: “I only wish I had the opportunity to vote for you a third time.” Also, I want to thank you for making us proud to be Americans again. I am grateful for your affirmation of positive family values during your administration.<sup>115</sup>

The relationship that Vines shared with Reagan carried over into his relationship with President George H. W. Bush. Vines headed a trip with a select group of Southern Baptist leaders that met with Vice-President Bush in the days before he was elected to the White House.<sup>116</sup> Vines’ group repeatedly asked Bush to answer, “Why should we support you?”<sup>117</sup> The open and forthright exchange fostered a trust between Vines, Bush, and the President’s campaign official, Doug Wead.

Wead and Vines corresponded quite frequently during Vines’ second term as SBC president.<sup>118</sup> The relationship that they shared was amicable, but it was not without honest discourse. Not long after being elected president, President Bush responded to Vines’ invitation and agreed to make a guest appearance at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. After the date had been set, Vines learned that Bush had made an unprecedented move to invite an openly homosexual group to the White House.

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<sup>115</sup>Jerry Vines to Ronald Reagan, letter, 8 November 1988, Jerry Vines Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville.

<sup>116</sup> Stan Hasteley and Mary Knox, “Bush Meets with Evangelicals Including Southern Baptists,” *Baptist Press* 4 August 1998, 2. The other Southern Baptist pastors who joined Vines included Adrian Rogers, Paul Pressler, Morris Chapman, and Edwin Young.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup>In Jerry Vines Papers, an archive of Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, there are four correspondence exchanges between Doug Wead, Special Assistant to the President for Public Liaison and Jerry Vines.

Never had such a concession been permitted by a United States president. The disparity of Bush's decision and the biblical values held by Southern Baptists led Vines to withdraw the invitation.<sup>119</sup> The move was clearly confrontational, yet the candor and forthrightness that Vines demonstrated while acting as president of the Southern Baptist Convention was a quality that President Bush continued to respect. At the bottom of a formal letter addressed to Vines that he received at the end of his term as Convention president, Wead included the following hand-written note: "Jerry: The President has been very blessed to have your wisdom these past few years. God bless you and thank you for your efforts at keeping the SBC in the Word!"<sup>120</sup>

When Vines reflected upon his involvement in the Conservative Resurgence that culminated in his election as president, he summarized his motivation and accomplishments as follows,

Paul Pressler and Paige Patterson came along, expressing the same concerns I had about the liberalism in the convention. And then, they began to coalesce preachers from some of the larger churches: myself, Adrian Rogers, Jimmy Draper, Bailey Smith, Ed Young, Charles Stanley, and Morris Chapman. We had a song playing inside of us that we couldn't quite put together. Then one day two men, Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler, came along and they put the words to the music and told us how to do it. And then we realized that to take the stand we were going to take would be denominational suicide, but we were willing to pay that price to turn the convention around. As it turned out, we didn't commit denominational suicide. God gave us the denomination and we all became presidents of the convention. But we didn't know that going in, because every indication was our necks would be on the chopping blocks. But the more we were attacked by the moderates, the more folk heroes we became by the rank and the file out there, because we were singing their tune.<sup>121</sup>

As the decade of the 1980s ended, so did the denominational battles that

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<sup>119</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 18 April 2010. For an objective report of Vines' decision to withdraw his invitation to Pres. Bush, consult Greg Warner, "President Bush Declines Invitation to Speak at SBC," *Baptist Press* 18 May 1990, 1.

<sup>120</sup>Doug Wead to Jerry Vines, letter, 13 July 1990, Jerry Vines Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville.

<sup>121</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 25 August 2009.

marked the Resurgence. Conservatives had predicted that a ten-year cycle of conservative Convention presidents would solidify their control. Vines' election proved that their projections were correct.<sup>122</sup>

### **Decade of the 1990s**

The decade of the nineties afforded Vines the opportunity to focus on his pastorate at First Baptist, Jacksonville. The demands of the Conservative Resurgence and the presidency of the Convention required him to spend time away from the pulpit. Lindsay assumed the added responsibility and preached in his absence during this period, but now the two co-pastors could resume fulfilling the preaching responsibility equally.

The evangelistic results the church experienced in the nineties were similar in scope to the previous decade. Yet, Guinell Freeman, former Director of Education at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, acknowledges that the era he identified as “phenomenal church growth” ended in 1993.<sup>123</sup> From 1990-1999 the church baptized 8,902 people, averaging 890 baptisms per year. Average Sunday School attendance stayed above 6,000 people per year until 1999 when it dipped to an average of 5,659. Total membership grew from 15,716 in 1990 to 26,088 in 1999, and total undesignated offering received for 1999 was \$11,300,604. Missions giving for the same year totaled \$1,045,004.<sup>124</sup>

A significant event of Vines' ministry occurred at the beginning of 1993 when First Baptist Jacksonville, Florida moved into its present 10,000 seat auditorium. The

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<sup>122</sup>Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 139.

<sup>123</sup>Guinell Freeman, quoted by Nancy Smith, “A Faithful Soldier,” 23.

<sup>124</sup>Statistics obtained in email to author 11 October 2006 from Rachel D. Tracey, Department Secretary for Information Support Services, Florida Baptist Convention.

completion of the building marked the conscious decision of the church to remain downtown. Vines explained:

The conviction was there needs to be a strong witness in the heart of the city. Also, neighborhoods have a way of growing and declining; so to stay in the center of the city, regardless of whatever happens, you still remain central in the city. Of course, our city has not just moved from neighborhood to neighborhood; it has grown out—the circle has gotten bigger, which means we have to work a lot harder to reach people! But we just believe there’s a real testimony to have a strong preaching station and a strong witness for Christ in the middle of the city.<sup>125</sup>

Carr recollects that the church’s numerical growth in worship attendance and Sunday School slowed around the time that the move was made into the new facility. There were years of numerical growth after the transition into the new auditorium, but he remembers that growth seemed to become a more difficult task. He offers several factors for the shift. The city kept expanding outward. Churches in Jacksonville Florida’s suburbs began growing. The large auditorium took away the option of multiple Sunday morning services.<sup>126</sup>

In February, 1994, Vines was dealt the personal blow of losing Jesse Hendley, one of his fathers in the ministry. A week after his funeral, Vines wrote to Hendley’s son, David, thanking him for a kind note and the privilege to speak at his funeral. Vines writes: “As I said at the funeral, to say a word at your dad’s funeral is the greatest honor God has given me. I considered him to be the greatest man of God I have ever known.”<sup>127</sup> When I asked Vines about the men who influenced his commitment to evangelism the most, his answer explains why preaching Hendley’s funeral was such an honor to him. Along with Gray Allison and L. R. Scarborough, Hendley was one of Vines’ greatest influences.

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<sup>125</sup>Duduit, “Taking the Word Downtown,” 197.

<sup>126</sup>Calvin Carr, personal interview by author, 14 April 2010.

<sup>127</sup>Jerry Vines to David Hendley, letter, 9 December 1994, Jerry Vines Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville.

Hendley was the preacher that influenced Vines' evangelistic preaching the most. While speaking of Hendley, Vines remarks, "He was a fine theologian and scholar, and yet he was also a red hot evangelist. His name is not going to show up on anyone's list of great theologians, but to me, he may be the greatest one I ever encountered."<sup>128</sup> As evidenced in several of Vines' sermons, Hendley's example encouraged him not to shy away from preaching the doctrine of hell. For instance, in Vines' message entitled, "Jacksonville's Good, Bad, and Ugly,"

I was going to say about Dr. Hendly describing a person's body being cremated. I've never seen it and I don't want to see it. He told of the process he saw and how they took the body to be cremated. He talked about how fire began to shoot out of the nostrils of the body and out the mouth and ears of the body until finally it was consumed in a furnace of fire. I don't know all that is meant there except to say to you that it is a terrible tragedy to think a person could be a tare in this world—lost and undone—and one day the angels come and reap them and cast them into a place which is called by the Lord Jesus a furnace of fire. Dear friend, don't go to hell. Dear lost person, don't go to hell. Jesus said there will be weeping, that is, emotional agony in hell. The Bible says there will be gnashing of teeth—physical agony in hell. Don't go to hell.<sup>129</sup>

A survey of Hendley's messages reveals he consistently preached on hell.<sup>130</sup>

Once Hendley told Vines, "You see, Jerry, the reason I preach on hell is because I really do believe there is one and I don't want anybody to go there."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 17 August 2006.

<sup>129</sup>Jerry Vines, "Jacksonville's Good, Bad, and Ugly" [on-line]; sermon manuscript of message delivered on 11 August 1996; accessed 21 October 2006; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>130</sup> Jesse Hendley, *Dr. Jesse M. Hendley* [CD-ROM], an archive of sermon manuscripts written and preached by Jesse Hendley. To understand Hendley's view on the doctrine of hell, consult the following messages: "A Study of Hades;" "A Rich Man Shall Hardly Enter the Kingdom;" "Dead or Alive to God;" "Eternity;" "Rebellion or Submission—Which;" "Without Excuse."

<sup>131</sup>Jerry Vines, "From Retribution to Restoration" [on-line]; sermon manuscript of message delivered on 1 April 2001; accessed 21 October 2006; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

Hendley was a mentor and model of effective ministry for Vines, but he was also a close friend. In First Baptist's newsletter, following Hendley's funeral, Vines speaks of the depth of their personal relationship and the reasons why Hendley had garnered his respect and admiration. He writes,

Dr. Hendley was one of the great men of God of our time. He was both a scholar and a warm hearted evangelist. I have never met a man in my life who had a more profound understanding of the word of God. He could read Hebrew and Greek like most of us read English. Alongside his brilliant scholarship was a heart red-hot to win souls to Jesus. What a wonder, God-blessed combination! Dr. Hendley was the preacher in the greatest revival our church ever experienced. I can still see people flowing down the stairs from the balcony like waterfalls. We had 375 people saved and 350 of them were baptized. He had an intense love for the Lord Jesus. He would get so caught up in talking about Jesus that he would exclaim at times, "Let's go right now!" He was my dear friend. He was a father in the ministry to me. I along with preachers and God's people all over the country will miss him. Heaven is sweeter because he is there. God bless you, Dr. Hendley. We will see you soon.<sup>132</sup>

In 1999 Vines partnered with Jim Shaddix to make another significant contribution to the field of expository preaching. Again working with Moody Press, Vines allowed Shaddix to edit these first two volumes into a single volume titled, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*. Speaking about his editorial work of Vines' previous two volumes, Shaddix explains,

The two earlier works by Dr. Vines, from which this revision has been developed, have served pastors and other preachers well for more than a decade. The intent of this new work is not to fix something that was broken, but simply to expand its use in a variety of training contexts. Almost 100 percent of the original material has been preserved in this new format. The information simply has been reorganized, updated, and expanded in order to broaden its application to include preaching in training as well as pastors already serving in the field. Hopefully, the new format will extend the longevity of the impact of Dr. Vines's work.<sup>133</sup>

For Vines, the decade of the 1990s ended with as much activity as it began. During the 1999 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention that convened in

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<sup>132</sup>Jerry Vines, "A Word From Our Pastors," *Church of the Open Door* (Jacksonville, FL: First Baptist Church, 11 December 1994), 1.

<sup>133</sup>Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 12.

Atlanta, Georgia, the Convention came together and presented the following motion to President Paige Patterson: “I move that in your capacity as Southern Baptist Convention chairman, you appoint a blue ribbon committee to review the Baptist Faith and Message statement with the responsibility to report and bring any recommendations to this meeting next June in Orlando.”<sup>134</sup> Adrian Rogers was named as the committee’s chairman. Its body was comprised of Max Barnett, Steve Gaines, Susie Hawkins, Rudy A. Hernandez, Charles S. Kelley, Jr., Heather King, Richard D. Land, Fred Luter, R. Albert Mohler, Jr., T. C. Pinckney, Nelson Price, Roger Spradlin, Simon Tsoi, and Jerry Vines.<sup>135</sup> The work of the study committee concluded at the Convention’s 2000 annual meeting that convened in Orlando, Florida. At that meeting the convention voted to accept the committee’s revisions as the Baptist Faith and Message 2000.

### **Decade of the 2000s**

The beginning of the twenty-first century was a time of momentous significance in Vines’ ministry career. In February 2000, First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida’s co-pastor, Homer Lindsay, Jr. passed away. Nancy Smith records the details of the visit that Vines spent with Lindsay on the day of his death from the perspective of an unnamed staff member of the church: “I watched Jerry Vines lean over Dr. Lindsay about three hours before he died and say with tears streaming off of his cheeks and falling onto Dr. Lindsay’s face, ‘I love you, Homer. I am going to preach the Word now. With that, Vines went to preach at church on Sunday night, and Dr. Lindsay was gone shortly after the service.” At Lindsay’s funeral, Vines read about Elisha, a great

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<sup>134</sup>Paige Patterson, quoted in “Report of the Baptist Faith and Message Study Committee to the Southern Baptist Convention June 14, 2000” [on-line]; accessed 10 November 2010; available from [http://www.ncbaptist.org/fileadmin/ncbaptist.org\\_graphics/CPMD/Docs/Baptist\\_Faith\\_\\_Message.pdf](http://www.ncbaptist.org/fileadmin/ncbaptist.org_graphics/CPMD/Docs/Baptist_Faith__Message.pdf); Internet.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid.

prophet of God and quoted from 2 Kings 4:9: “And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this [is] a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually.” Vines explained he did not know of a Scripture that more epitomizes the Lindsay’s life and ministry more than that particular passage. He stated, “I’m so thankful this man of God passed by me, touched me. He passed by Jacksonville, and he has left his mark on the city of Jacksonville.”<sup>136</sup>

After Lindsay’s death, Vines took the full mantle of leadership as the sole pastor of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida. From 2000-2005 the church baptized 3,449 people. First Baptist averaged over 5,700 in Sunday School each year until 2005 when the number declined to 5,290. Despite the drop that the church reported in baptisms and average Sunday School attendance in comparison to the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, total membership increased to 28,705 and undesignated budget receipts were at an all-time high in 2005 of \$12,808,331. Missions giving was at its highest in this period in 2000 when \$1,127,413 was reported. Though it steadily declined in the years that followed, the year before his retirement, it still totaled \$660,893.<sup>137</sup>

A challenging season in Vines’ ministry centered on a statement he made at the 2002 Pastors’ Conference of the Southern Baptist Convention that convened in St. Louis, Missouri. On occasions, throughout his years of ministry, his public statements produced a lightning rod effect both within and outside of the Southern Baptist Convention. Perhaps the greatest example came as he explained the supremacy of Christianity over the claims of Islam. He stated,

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<sup>136</sup>Smith, “A Faithful Soldier,” 25-26.

<sup>137</sup>Statistics obtained in email to author 11 October 2006 from Rachel D. Tracey, Department Secretary for Information Support Services, Florida Baptist Convention.

“Christianity was founded by the virgin-born Jesus Christ. Islam was founded by Mohammed, a demon-possessed pedophile who had 12 wives, and his last one was a 9-year-old girl,” Jerry Vines said to applause at the SBC Pastors' Conference. “Allah is not Jehovah, either. Jehovah is not going to turn anyone into a terrorist that will try to bomb people and take the lives of thousands and thousands of people.”<sup>138</sup>

Vines' statements were heavily reported by the national media.<sup>139</sup> When asked to substantiate his sources for his statement, he appealed to a book authored by Emir and Ergun Caner, *Unveiling Islam*.<sup>140</sup> In the book, the Caners, who are themselves converts from Islam, cite references to the *Hadith* to explain Muhammad's pedophilia and his personal admission to demonic influence.<sup>141</sup> In a united showing of support, Southern Baptist Convention leaders released public statements agreeing to Vines' position.<sup>142</sup> A week after making the statement, Vines offered a public statement on 17 June 2002 from the pulpit of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville. He appealed to Muslim scholars to publicly respond to his statements by offering their explanation of the ancient document in question. Yet, he refused to apologize for his statement or meet with members of the Islamic community. He concluded, “I love Muslim people. I have found many of them to be kind, gentle and loving people. Many Muslims have come to our church to hear of the

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<sup>138</sup>Jerry Vines, quoted by Staff and wire reporters, “Vines Calls Founder of Islam a ‘Demon-Possessed Pedophile,’” *Biblical Recorder* (14 June 2002) [on-line]; accessed 10 November 2010; available from [http://www.biblicalrecorder.org/content/news/2002/6\\_14\\_2002/ne140602vines.shtml](http://www.biblicalrecorder.org/content/news/2002/6_14_2002/ne140602vines.shtml); Internet.

<sup>139</sup>Art Toalston, “Jerry Vines to Stay on the Go After 23-Year Fla. Pastorate,” *Baptist Press* (12 May 2005) [on-line]; accessed 19 October 2006; available from <http://www.bpnews.net/printerfrinedly.asp?ID=20778>; Internet. Toalston calls this statement “Vines' most visible moment in the national spotlight.”

<sup>140</sup>Ergun Mehmet Caner and Emir Fethi Caner, *Unveiling Islam* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002).

<sup>141</sup>*Ibid.*, 41-42. Vines based his claim of Muhammad's pedophilia from the Caners' assertion, “Only later did Muhammad have eleven other women as wives and concubines, the youngest of whom was nine when they consummated their marriage” (41). Vines' basis for his claim of Muhammad's demon possession is the Caners' assertion: “Muhammad was deathly afraid of the source of the revelation, believing at first that he was possessed by an evil spirit or *jinn*” (42).

<sup>142</sup>Staff and wire reporters, “Vines Calls Founder.”

love, joy, peace and saving grace available to all in Jesus Christ.”<sup>143</sup>

Vines did not make any public statements on the issue until giving an interview to NBC Nightly News that was aired on 25 February 2002. Anchor Tom Brokaw introduced the segment, “Preaching hate. When words from the pulpit sound like words of war. American versus American.”<sup>144</sup> The day after the segment aired, on 26 February 2002, Vines gave the following response to the segment to Baptist Press,

Is it fair that they did not use a single line in which I affirmed my belief in religious freedom, my love for people of all faiths and my great desire that people might come to know salvation which is available alone through Jesus Christ? Is it balanced that not one single member of my congregation (who have listened to me preach for over 20 years now) was given a chance to say whether or not I preach hate? I have been preaching the loving Gospel of Jesus Christ for 49 years. I challenge NBC Nightly News, or anyone, to find one single sentence, word or syllable of hate in any message I have delivered during those years.<sup>145</sup>

Vines felt the repercussions of his statement for a considerable amount of time after the NBC Nightly News report was aired. He received death threats. But the statement was one that he does not regret. His motivation was to share the truth of a religion that countered the exclusivity of Christ so that in his doing, Muslims could come to Christ.

## **Retirement**

Vines announced his retirement from the pastorate to First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida on 1 May 2005. Overwhelmed by his emotions, he exhorted the

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<sup>143</sup> “Vines, No Apology to Muslims,” *News 4 Jax.com* (17 June 2002) [on-line]; accessed 10 November 2010; available from <http://www.news4jax.com/news/1515305/detail.html>; Internet.

<sup>144</sup> Jerry Vines, quoted by Joni B. Hannigan, “Vines Speaks out Against NBC News Report,” *Florida Baptist Witness* (4 March 2003) [on-line]; accessed 4 June 2010; available from <http://www.gofbw.com/news.asp?ID=575>; Internet.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

church by saying that they had yet to see its most glorious days of ministry. He stated, “If a pastor was called on to just draw a picture of his dream church, when he got through it would be a picture of the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Florida. I’m thrilled to death that God has let me be the pastor of such a dream church.”<sup>146</sup> His retirement officially began nine months later after he preached the closing message at the twentieth annual Pastor’s Conference hosted by the church on 7 February 2006.<sup>147</sup>

Since then, Vines and his wife Janet have relocated back to their home state and currently reside in Canton, Georgia. He has launched a website, [www.jerryvines.com](http://www.jerryvines.com), which offers a variety of resources to help preachers who are particularly committed to expository preaching. The site offers a subscriber-based “VinesLines” newsletter that discusses his commentary on a variety of issues related to contemporary life and ministry. He has released Sunday School literature called, “Vines by the Book,” that equips churches interested in expositional Sunday School teaching. He hosts conferences pertaining to matters of contemporary theology and preaching. He also maintains a rigorous itinerant preaching ministry. He and his wife Janet are members of First Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia. Today, he continues to live according to the motif that has marked his life, for he still serves as a faithful soldier.

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<sup>146</sup>Jerry Vines, quoted by James A. Smith Sr., “Jerry Vines to Retire in ’06; FBC Orlando Announces Transition,” *Baptist Press* (2 May 2005) [on-line]; accessed 28 May 2010; available from <http://www.bpnews.net/printerfriendly.asp?ID=20708>; Internet.

<sup>147</sup>Gerald Harris, “Jerry Vines Retires, Returns to Georgia,” *The Christian Index* (16 February 2006) [on-line]; accessed 19 October 2006; available from <http://www.christianindex.org/1996.article.print>.

## Conclusion

Jerry Vines will rightfully be remembered for his commitment to expository preaching. Paige Patterson professes, “I wouldn’t hesitate to say that Dr. Vines and Dr. Adrian Rogers were the two most important figures in the conservative movement.”<sup>148</sup> These statements attest to a life of exceptional ministry. To fully understand Vines’ motivation for over fifty years of ministry, one can look to a life of faithful personal evangelism and evangelistic expository preaching. Nearing his retirement, Nancy Smith asked Vines if he knew how many souls he had led to the Lord in his half-century of ministry. He quietly replied,

No, I don’t have any clue on that. In all our churches, we’ve been blessed. We’ve seen a lot of people saved in our churches. So, I wouldn’t have any way to know. Job said, “My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.” So, when we get to heaven, we’ll see what it is. It’s not enough, I’m sure of that.<sup>149</sup>

The content of this chapter substantiates the thesis that Vines’ preaching ministry is a model of evangelistic focus. The facts of his life demonstrate that he maintained a fervent evangelistic commitment throughout the breadth of his pastoral ministry. His life is marked by consistent commitment to personal evangelism. His interconnected commitments to the inerrancy of Scripture, preaching, and witnessing led him to have a significant role of leadership in the Southern Baptist Convention. They also largely contributed to more than 23,000 people who professed faith and followed through with believers’ baptism. Yet, a life of evangelistic passion and fruitfulness is only a part of what makes Vines a model of such study. The next chapter asserts that at the foundation of his ministry is a sound theological framework for evangelism.

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<sup>148</sup>Paige Patterson, quoted by Toalston, “Jerry Vines to Stay on the Go.”

<sup>149</sup>Smith, “A Faithful Soldier,” 15.

CHAPTER 3  
AN EXPLORATION OF VINES' THEOLOGICAL  
FRAMEWORK OF EVANGELISM

**Introduction**

In a personal interview, Charles Jerry Vines stated, “My theology has driven my methodology in that I have never been able and never been willing to do anything methodologically that I felt like was inconsistent with good theology.”<sup>1</sup> The aim of this chapter is to put this statement to the test. In so doing, I am also testing the thesis of this dissertation. If Vines is a model of evangelistic effectiveness, then it must be true that he consistently preached and held to a biblically-centered theology, especially regarding matters of theology that impacted his evangelistic efforts. This chapter will discuss the theological underpinnings of Vines’ approach to evangelism. It surmises that Vines’ theology is not only biblical, but it is thoroughly Baptist, and his theological method is a model for any pastor pursuing a career of ministry marked by evangelistic focus. The matters that will be discussed in this chapter are Vines’ theological method, revelation, atonement, pneumatology, soteriology, and eschatology. I conclude with an evaluation of his theology.

**A Baptist Theological Method**

A proper analysis of Vines’ theology begins with his theological method. Central to the formation of his doctrine is a commitment he made during his seminary

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<sup>1</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 17 August 2006.

years. As noted earlier in this dissertation, to protect his theology from liberalism he determined:

When I was in seminary, I made this decision, I knew that I had the invariable responsibility to witness. You can't read the New Testament without reaching this conclusion. So, I decided that everything I heard, or anything that I was considering about my position, if it in anyway lessened my desire to be a witness or cooled my passion for soul winning, I would not accept that position.<sup>2</sup>

This statement is commendable. It is hard to fathom that there exists a correct biblical doctrine that lessens one's desire to do the work of an evangelist. Yet, the statement does not sufficiently capture the robustness of Vines' theological method. One can turn to his writings and preaching for a more complete treatment of the criteria used to determine his doctrinal positions. These sources reveal that the filter that protects both the orthodoxy of Vines' theology and deepens his passion for soul winning is the Bible. What he pursues is a biblical theology.

When Vines discusses biblical theology, his definition is quite different from a more commonly accepted definition of the term. Thomas Schreiner explains that "biblical theology focuses on the storyline of scripture—the unfolding of the storyline of God's plan in redemptive history, so that in every passage we preach we consider the place of that text in relationship to the whole storyline of the Bible."<sup>3</sup> While Vines would likely affirm the value of appropriating Schreiner's definition into one's formulation of doctrine, when he uses the term "biblical theology," he is describing a pursuit of doctrinal

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, "Preaching and Biblical Theology," *SBJT* 10 (2006): 22. For another definition of "biblical theology," consult Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, Richard B. Garrin, Jr., ed. (Phillipsburg, P & R, 1980), 15 as quoted in Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2007), 122. Vos asserts, "Biblical Theology, rightly defined, is nothing else than the exhibition of the organic progress of supernatural revelation in its historic continuity and multiformity."

positions that are purely defined and determined by Scripture. In his theological approach he is averse to labels. He attempts to say nothing more, or less, than the Scriptures say.

### **Marks of Vines' Theological Method**

There are three primary marks found in Vines' theological method. First, a foundational text for Vines' theology is Matthew 28:19-20. Also known as "The Great Commission," this text is essential to his theological underpinnings for evangelism.

While speaking of the theology that served as the impetus for Vines' leading his church to be evangelistic, he explained,

My theological underpinnings are this: The divine command of the two purposes of the church are number one, to lead people to Christ, and number two, to help those who do know Christ, to grow in their faith. We placed a big emphasis on the purposes of the church. We kept hammering away at the church's two purposes. You can follow that all the way through the book of Acts, so this is where we are missing it in our churches today. No criticism needed, but the model we want is not some contemporary model, but the New Testament. But we just kept hammering away what the purposes of the church are and after awhile, the people were excited to catch on.<sup>4</sup>

These ecclesiological commitments kept the Great Commission at the center of the churches he pastored. Calvin Carr, a long time staff member who served with Vines, remembers,

When I think about Dr. Vines and evangelism, he never lost the joy of seeing people saved. He modeled it. He preached it. He would hold up a scout's salute and focus upon the middle finger. He would then explain that the purpose of the church is to reach the lost and disciple the saved. He would ask, "Now, what's the priority of those two? They are both in scripture, but one finger is a little bit higher than the other, and evangelism, in my opinion, has to be the priority to keep us from turning inward."<sup>5</sup>

Discipleship is an important aspect of Vines' ministry, but slightly more critical to him

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<sup>4</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 17 August 2006.

<sup>5</sup>Calvin Carr, personal interview by author, 14 April 2010.

was the church's call to reach the lost. He feared that lessening the priority of evangelism would lead to a church that was less committed to its practice.

Much of his prioritization of evangelism stems from what he calls "the irresistible logic of the Bible." While this logic stems from the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), he understood that this logic encompassed the entirety of Scripture. At various times, there are other interchangeable titles that Vines gives this passage. When speaking of the main business of the church, he explains that this text possesses "the irresistible logic of the church." Moreover, he often adds that these verses possess "the irresistible logic of evangelism." While his title for the logic of this text may vary, his explanation of it is always consistent. He explains:

If there is a heaven and there is, and if there is a hell and there is, and if Jesus died on the cross to make it possible for people to go to heaven and to not go to hell, then the most important business of the church is to let people know that they do not have to go to hell, they can go to heaven. Because Jesus died on that cross for their sins it is possible for them to go to heaven.<sup>6</sup>

Vines finds a God-given imperative within this logic that binds the entirety of the Bible together. Thus, when a church sets its efforts toward doing the work of evangelism, it is fulfilling the main purpose for which it is intended. As individuals accomplish this work, they place their effort in the task that God has deemed to be their most important priority.

Another mark of Vines' theology is that he makes no apologies when the theological positions he holds are not systematic. He does believe that systematic theology is a helpful discipline, but he refuses to be bound to a particular systematic theologian. He explains,

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<sup>6</sup>Jerry Vines, "The Church's Main Business," An audio recorded message of an exposition of Matthew 28:16-20 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL, 2003; CD. In this message, Vines explains this quote as "the irresistible logic of the church." In a personal interview with the author 25 August 2009, he refers to this concept as the "irresistible logic of the Bible" and the "irresistible logic of evangelism."

I do not think there is a thing wrong with the study of systematic theology, but I think we have to study it, always aware that systematic theology is always someone's system. Whether Calvin's or Vines' theology, we must always remember that systematic theology attempts to systematize that which cannot be systematized, because any system of theology imposes an outside system upon the Scripture.<sup>7</sup>

When preaching on the subject, he plainly states his critique of systematic theology. It is man's attempt to devise a system to explain the mind of God. The problem systematic theologians face is that "God won't fit in your little box."<sup>8</sup>

In concert with Vines' view of systematic theology is the third mark of his theological method. Rather than pursue a systematic theology, his desire is to be a biblicist. In that pursuit, it is of no concern to him if he writes and preaches like a Calvinist or Arminian. He views the Bible as the sole authority for faith and practice. A pure interpretation of its content, without the confusing mixture of labels or logical conclusions, is what he believes leads to a precise, biblically formulated theology.

### **An Example of Vines' Theological Method**

Vines' response to a particular aspect of Calvinism offers a helpful demonstration of his method. As will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, he clearly holds that penal substitution atonement is the central doctrine for a biblical understanding of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Along with this view, Vines also holds the view of general redemption to explain the atonement's extent. Some Calvinists who hold to particular redemption may read Vines' view and respond with a variety of

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<sup>7</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 17 August 2006.

<sup>8</sup>Jerry Vines, "Baptist Battles: Calvinism," sermon delivered at First Baptist Church, Woodstock, GA 8 October 2006; CD. In a personal email with the author 7 October 2010, Vines stated his critique of systematic theology in a slightly different way: "The Bible reveals the mind of God. No system devised by the finite mind of man can contain His infinite mind. I think that's where our Calvinist and Arminian friends go astray. They devise a system, then try to force Scripture to conform. When you accept a label you get tagged with everything that goes with that label."

rebuttals. They may argue for the need for logical consistency, as does Roger Nicole when he reasons, “Christ could not punish sin twice. He could not punish it in the person of the redeemer and then punish it later again in the person of the perpetrator.”<sup>9</sup> A Calvinist may argue as does J.I. Packer, when he asserts, “Calvinism is thus theism, religion, and evangelicalism, all in their purest and most highly developed form.”<sup>10</sup> Then while pleading Calvinism’s five points to be inseparable, Packer insists, “They hang together; you cannot reject one without rejecting them all.”<sup>11</sup> A Calvinist might even argue, along with Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, that Vines needs to study church history and be reminded, “Particular redemption was part of the fabric of Reformed theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and only when this was *denied* did some become uncertain of penal substitution.”<sup>12</sup>

To these arguments, Vines responds with well-reasoned simplicity. He understands that when he arrives at logical conclusions in areas that the Scriptures are silent, he likely moves beyond scriptural parameters. Thus, he does not believe the Bible allows for the reconciliation of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. He recognizes his theology at times sounds Calvinistic while, at other times, Arminian.<sup>13</sup> His

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<sup>9</sup>Roger Nicole, “Particular Redemption,” lecture delivered at The Philadelphia Conference of Reformed Theology, 1978; Audiocassette.

<sup>10</sup>J. I. Packer, “Introductory Essay,” in *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, John Owen (East Peoria, IL: The Banner of Truth, 2007), 5.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 6. In Vines’ sermon entitled, “Baptist Battles: Calvinism,” Vines follows Packer’s logic by rejecting all five points of Calvinism. As will be seen in this chapter, especially in his rejection of perseverance of the saints, his rejection of the Doctrines of Grace does not mean that Vines holds to Arminian positions. Vines, “Baptist Battles.”

<sup>12</sup>Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions* (Nottingham, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 271.

<sup>13</sup>Jerry Vines, telephone interview with author 20 November 2007. One of the goals of my research was to better understand why Vines views Calvinism as a threat for

view shows little concern for the historical observation that his breaking the link of penal substitution and particular redemption might open the door to future heresy.<sup>14</sup> These arguments matter little to Vines, for he says, “What I am after is a biblical theology.”<sup>15</sup>

He pursues a biblical theology because his high view of Scripture does not bind him to a system of philosophy. He asserts that Calvinism “is more a system of philosophy than a biblical approach. If you follow it philosophically, you are led to a lot of these things. But our authority is not philosophy, but Scripture.”<sup>16</sup> With Scripture as his authority, whatever the Scriptures intensify, he strives to intensify. Thus, he acknowledges places in the “Bible that speak of God’s sovereignty, foreknowledge, predestination, election, it’s there. But yet also the New Testament teaches human responsibility. Logically, where they reconcile, the human mind cannot comprehend, but it’s really not my job.”<sup>17</sup>

Second, his pursuit of a biblical theology does not bind him to a particular systematic theologian. While it is not wrong to study the theological positions of others, Vines places greatest gain on one’s personal theology developed from one’s own study of

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evangelism. In Vines, “Baptist Battles: Calvinism,” his reasons are given. First and foremost, he does not believe the Doctrines of Grace have biblical warrant. He finds elements of biblical truth in each doctrine, but he does not find enough agreement in any to advocate them as his view(s). Second, he perceives that many Calvinists seem to give off an heir of intellectual arrogance. Third, while he credits several historical and contemporary Calvinists for possessing an intense evangelistic zeal, he posits that these Calvinists are evangelistic in spite of their Calvinism, not because of it. A fourth was given in a personal interview with me 17 August 2006. Calvinism squelches his personal zeal for evangelism in like fashion to the liberalism of his college and seminary days.

<sup>14</sup>I do not arrive at this assertion from direct interaction with Vines. This is a deduction I make from my own evaluation of his position.

<sup>15</sup>Vines, personal interview by author, 17 August 2006.

<sup>16</sup>Jerry Vines, telephone interview by author, 20 November 2007. Vines makes the same assertion in his message, “Baptist Battles, A Baptist and His Calvinism.”

<sup>17</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 17 August 2006.

the Scriptures. Thus, he is likely opposed to the kind of commendation that Packer gives to Calvinism when he acknowledges a single systematic theology to be religion in its purest form.

Third, his high view of Scripture removes the necessity of constructing theological positions to protect sound doctrine. Though he has not been asked to give a response to Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach's argument, his other positions lead me to assume he would respond like this: If Scripture teaches penal substitution, and if Scripture teaches that Christ died for the world, the most effective way to protect sound doctrine is to hold to it.

Vines' theological method is not a novelty. Historical precedence exists for the components of his theological method that are described above. I find a correlation in Vines' theological method and that of the Anabaptists.

### **Linking Vines' Theological Method to the Anabaptist Tradition**

Calling Vines a Calvinist would be a mistake. Labeling him an Arminian would be equally erroneous. Rather than define his theology along the lines of the Remonstrants and Contra-remonstrants, a more accurate way to analyze his doctrinal positions is presented by Malcolm Yarnell. Vines possesses what Yarnell would assert is a Baptist theological method. In his work of historical theology, he assesses the scriptural lenses through which Roman Catholics, Lutheran, Reformation Calvinists, and Anabaptists have peered to develop their various movements. He concludes, "Of the four Reformation era traditions just mentioned, Baptists come closest to the Anabaptists, for we are their theological heirs, even if we may or may not claim to be their direct historical heirs."<sup>18</sup> In his *Formation of Christian Doctrine*, Yarnell offers the theological

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<sup>18</sup>Malcolm Yarnell, "The Heart of a Baptist" (A White paper from the CTR, December 2005) [on-line]; accessed 4 October 2010; available from <http://www.Baptist>

method that marks the Anabaptist tradition. I have found several noteworthy areas of congruence in comparing their theological method with that of Vines.

First, the fundamental contribution of the Anabaptists is the importance of the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20) in the development of theological doctrine.<sup>19</sup> Yarnell declares this passage to be foundational and at the heart of Baptist theology, for it establishes “the purpose, platform, and program of the church.”<sup>20</sup> Prior to and during the Reformation, this text was considered to be primarily for the apostles. Yet, the Anabaptist theologian Balthasar Hubmaier treated it as normative for all Christians. He found it essential for all Christians to obediently fulfill its imperative, “For a serious command demands serious obedience and fulfillment.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, failure to follow it in its entirety was considered by Hubmaier to be “disorderly and disobedient to Christ.”<sup>22</sup>

Second, Anabaptist theology was unsystematic. Yarnell explains of the Anabaptist Pilgram Marpeck’s theology,

Unlike the rationalist theological guild of modern evangelicalism, Marpeck was not so much concerned with precise theological definitions as he was with sincere and entire obedience to God, whose will was revealed in Scripture. His writings are thus filled with biblical references and passionate calls to obey Christ

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Theology.org; Internet, 2. Paige Patterson has written a more recent work that discusses the theological inheritance that Baptists have received from Anabaptists. Paige Patterson, “Learning from the Anabaptists,” in *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future*, ed. David S. Dockery (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 123-37.

<sup>19</sup>Malcolm Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Broadman and Holman: Nashville, 2007), 11.

<sup>20</sup>Yarnell, “The Heart of a Baptist,” 2.

<sup>21</sup>Balthasar Hubmaier, *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* (1525), in *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. and ed. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1989), 122, quoted by Malcolm Yarnell, *The Formation*, 11.

<sup>22</sup>Yarnell, “The Heart of a Baptist,” 2.

and be a visible witness for Christ, but he is almost entirely unsystematic.<sup>23</sup>

The focus of Marpeck's theology dealt more with the church than with the academy. He believed the energy of the church needed to be focused on reading the Bible and living from it.

Third, Yarnell contends that at its primary interest, Anabaptist theology had the need to be strictly biblical. He translates Jan Kiwiet's analysis of Marpeck, "As a genuine Baptist, he was interested only in holy Scripture, which he frequently cites and to which he frequently refers. Theology, for Marpeck, is a systematic hermeneutic of Scripture."<sup>24</sup> Unlike modern approaches whose primary interests are critical-exegetical or biblical-theological, Marpeck looked to the Word as that which judged his theology.<sup>25</sup>

The similarities of Vines' theology and the theology of the Anabaptists necessitate an evaluative approach that is not constrained to what Yarnell describes as a "Reformed mold." Evaluating Vines' theology as having Calvinistic or Arminian leanings proves unprofitable because, as is attested to above, these systems of theology are of little significance to Vines. While explaining the previous mistakes that Reformed theologians have committed while evaluating Pilgram Marpeck, Yarnell states:

Due to the unsystematic nature of Marpeck's words, describing his theological foundation in a systematic way may appear somewhat arbitrary. The vibrant nature of his theology cannot be entirely contained in words because words were simply a way, though a necessary means, to discuss his vital relationship with God and his community. Yet in our post-Enlightenment world the theologian must necessarily "translate" Marpeck for today. This venture has been in part tried before but not as an attempt to let Marpeck's own emphases discern his theological method.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Yarnell, *The Formation*, 76.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 77.

Thus, Yarnell’s pursuit of another assessment of Marpeck’s theology is credible and appropriate. His analysis is not bound by the Protestant paradigm of systematic theology. He warns that to make the mistake of doing so leads one to “misrepresent Marpeck’s actual foundation.”<sup>27</sup> The similarity of these two theological approaches leads me to apply a similar paradigmatic approach to Vines’ theology of evangelism as Yarnell employed in constructing an evaluative paradigm for approaching Marpeck’s thought. In both cases, for one to correctly evaluate their theology, the assessor must take the considered theologian’s words and allow them to form the paradigm. This approach is what I attempt to do for Vines throughout the remainder of this chapter. The matters discussed below arise from the topics I have found Vines to frequently visit in his pastoral preaching. They are also topics that have arisen from the multiple personal interviews I have conducted with him. They involve his views on revelation, atonement, pneumatology, soteriology, and eschatology.

### **Revelation**

Foundational to Vines’ pursuit of a biblical theology is his doctrine of revelation. This doctrine anchors his preaching and evangelistic practices. He writes with David Allen:

Preaching the Word cannot be done authoritatively without the necessary epistemological foundations of an inerrant text and a philosophy of preaching that is built upon true exposition. The dearth of true biblical preaching in America today evinces the theological shift away from an inerrant Scripture. This is a weighty matter, for nothing less than the authority of God’s message and God’s messenger is on the line.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Jerry Vines and David Allen, “Biblical Authority and Homiletics,” in *Authority and Interpretation*, ed. Duane A. Garrett and Richard R. Melick, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 173.

At the time of this article, Vines observed a lack of biblical preaching in America and blamed it on the rejection of his view of revelation. Not only does he believe one's theology of revelation affects preaching, but he is also convinced that objecting to his view of revelation hinders evangelism. In the booklet form of *A Baptist and His Bible* Vines writes: "You can't have doubts about the Bible and be a soul-winner at the same time. The evangelist can't evangelize if he has misgivings about his evangel. As you go into the homes of the lost, what you believe about the Bible is absolutely crucial." He later states: "If you don't have a trustworthy Bible, you are out of business in the homes of lost people."<sup>29</sup> Vines believes that at the core of preaching and evangelism is the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration of the Word of God. This doctrine affirms a theology of revelation that views the Bible as the inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word of God.

### **Inspiration**

In *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation*, Vines opens a discussion on his view of inspiration with a metaphor. "Suppose you were introduced to a man you had never previously met. You do not know who he is or where he is from. How would you determine what his background is?"<sup>30</sup> The best way to find out what you want to know from the man is to ask the man himself. Similarly, the best way to discover the inspiration of the Bible is to let the Bible speak for itself.

As the Scriptures testify to their inspiration, Vines sees within it a pedagogical picture in 2 Peter 1:21. He asserts that human authors of Scripture were carried along by the Holy Spirit much like a sailboat is carried along by the wind. He sees a similar picture

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<sup>29</sup>Jerry Vines, *A Baptist and His Bible* (Jacksonville, FL: n.p., 1988), 14.

<sup>30</sup>Jerry Vines, *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1985), 38-39.

in Acts 1:16, for the Holy Spirit inspired David to prophecy about Judas so that Scripture would be fulfilled. He uses these texts to explain that the men who authored the books of the Bible “did so superintended by the Holy Spirit.” He goes on to state there is dual authorship involved in the writing of the Bible, for “the Holy Spirit. . . is the divine author, and various men were the human authors.”<sup>31</sup>

As the biblical writers served their role in the authorship of Scripture, Vines emphasizes their personalities are still detected in their writings. He explains, “One can see the burning sarcasm of Isaiah; the tender, earnest pathos of Jeremiah; the philosophical leanings of John; the sharp, crisp logic of Paul.” The authors of Scripture each had their own mind. He gives the metaphor, “Each man was the individual pipe of a magnificent organ. Each pipe of the organ is so fashioned that it might give one particular note and not another. Yet each pipe is filled with the same breath.” He affirms that the breath that filled each biblical writer was the Holy Spirit, but each man was a distinct individual. His circumstances and genetic fashioning gave him his own unique qualities.<sup>32</sup>

These aspects of Vines’ view of revelation are critical to his position, for they answer a challenge of contemporary scholarship. The tendency of liberal scholars is to emphasize the imperfect humanness of the Bible’s authors while minimizing the role of the Spirit. Vines counters this view with 2 Timothy 3:16, claiming that the Bible is “God breathed,” inspired in its totality. This particular nuance of his view is significant because it discredits those in contemporary scholarship who emphasize the human authorship of

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

the Bible in order to interpret it as fallible and prone to error. As he explains in *A Baptist and His Bible*,

Liberal scholarship claims that the Bible is accurate on salvation matters but not on matters of science and history. If you can't believe what the Bible says about the creation, how can you believe what it says about salvation? If you can't trust it concerning history, how can you trust it concerning eternity? Further, how do we separate salvation matters from other matters? Take the virgin birth. If the virgin birth is not historical and biological fact, then it is theological fiction. Or consider the resurrection of Christ. If there was not a time when and a place where the resurrection occurred, what kind of resurrection was it? Salvation matters are so embedded in historical matters that you cannot consistently attribute inspiration to the one and deny it to the other. Every line, every sentence, every word and every letter was placed in the Bible by the supernatural inspiration of God.<sup>33</sup>

Vines believes it illogical to assert that the Bible is inspired in certain matters and not all matters. He counters, "If God can overcome man's tendency to err at one point, why not at every point? The Divine nature of the Bible is analogous to the divine human nature of Christ."<sup>34</sup> Thus, he avows that the Bible does not *merely contain* the Word of God, for *it is* the Word of God.

A final aspect of Vines' view is that "inspiration extends to the words as well as the thoughts of Scripture."<sup>35</sup> Some hold that inspiration is maintained in the thought patterns of Scripture and not in the words, but Vines counters that it cannot be explained how one can have thoughts without words. One text to which he looks to support his view is 1 Corinthians 2:13. Here, Paul explains that the words the Holy Spirit teaches are clearly the words of Scripture. A second text to which Vines turns is Matthew 5:18. Jesus said that every iota and dot from the Law will be accomplished; thus Vines believes "if one is committed to the lordship of Jesus he must surely give careful attention to His

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<sup>33</sup>Vines, *A Baptist*, 6.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 5-6.

view of Scripture.”<sup>36</sup> Vines holds the view that Scripture testifies to its revelatory quality of being fully inspired. Vines also believes Scripture itself attests to the inerrancy of the original manuscripts.

### **Inerrancy**

A second fundamental aspect of Vines’ view of revelation is that the Bible affirms its own inerrancy. A text that Vines uses to support this aspect of his view is John 17:17. Jesus prays for His disciples to be sanctified by the Scriptures, because the Scriptures are God’s Word and His truth. As the biblical writers used their unique qualities to do their part in the authorship of the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit so overruled their human limitations that the Bible was written without error. Vines questions, “If we can grant the Spirit’s power to overrule human limitation at any point, can we not then admit His superintendence over every matter given in Scripture?” He reasons that since the Spirit superintended the authorship of an inerrant text, one can intelligently affirm that there are no scientific, historical, or prophetic errors in the Bible. This assertion is essential to his position, for one must be able to trust the Bible on those particular matters if he is to place confidence in Scripture on matters of salvation.<sup>37</sup>

Vines addresses one of the main arguments from those who disagree with his view of inerrancy. Objectors reason that since the original, inerrant manuscripts have never been found that we cannot maintain a view of the Bible’s indisputable accuracy. He counters by conceding that while it is true that the original documents have never been found, “the correct text can be recovered with accuracy from many sources.” He uses the following illustration to explain:

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<sup>36</sup>Vines, *A Practical Guide*, 40.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

On January 1, 1863, President Lincoln set his name and seal on the proclamation which set four million slaves free. The proclamation was written on four pages of ordinary foolscap in the president's own handwriting. The document perished in the great Chicago Fire of 1871. Suppose some slave-owner should seize a former slave of his, challenge him to produce Lincoln's Proclamation as the charter of liberty, and say that if he did not produce the original, he would hold him still in slavery; what could the ex-slave do? He could not produce the original, for the original was destroyed by fire. Although he could not produce the original *document*, he could recover and produce the original *text*. How? By copies of the same in public documents; newspapers of the period; by translations of the text in French, German, and other languages; by quotations from the proclamation in speeches, periodicals, and books. By comparing and combining all these, he could establish to the satisfaction of a court of law the original message which gave him liberty.<sup>38</sup>

Though the original documents have never been discovered, the thousands of original language manuscripts give Vines confidence in the correctness of the text. That confidence is strengthened by his observations of the Bible's resilience throughout the centuries, its transmission through thousands of copies into modern print, its protection to have withstood processes of propagation without losing its accuracy, and his personal experience of having its inerrant truth spoken into his heart and life.<sup>39</sup>

### **Authority**

There are several texts that Vines uses to confirm the authority of the Bible. In 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6, Paul writes that the gospel came to the believers in Thessalonica not in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction. He expresses the authority of Scripture to be a blessing for the preacher since he does not submit to his own ideas or the ideas of others. Rather, he preaches from the authority and power of the Word of God. The power of God works through him as he preaches out of this conviction and gives him awareness that he is a fellow laborer with God.

Vines believes that a reason that a minister might not choose to preach

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 38.

expository sermons is due to his lack of conviction about the Bible's authority. The preacher is commanded to do as Jesus commanded Peter and "Feed my lambs" (John 21:15-17). He is called to join Timothy in following Paul's plea to "Preach the Word" (1 Tim 4:2). To accept and meet these challenges, the preacher must have confidence in the power and authority of Scripture. Vines promises this confidence will also enable him to preach with a sense of urgency. He concludes, "Many years of careful study of the Bible have convinced me that the Bible is a book that man could not have written if he would and would not have written if he could."<sup>40</sup>

During his first term as president of the Convention, Vines preached the closing service of the annual meeting of the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio. Two days later, the front page of the *Columbus Dispatch* read, "Southern Baptist leader preaches Jesus, not politics." The author Debra Mason listened to Vines' message and understood enough about the dynamics of the Convention at the time to write, "Vines is considered a conservative in the so-called conservative-moderate struggle. The crux of the battle centers on—what else—the Bible. The conservatives believe in an unerring Bible; while the moderates are open to a broader interpretation." Vines was quoted by the newspaper reporter as explaining, "As I understand it, the crux of the issue is the nature of Scripture. Not what the Bible says, which is in the area of interpretation, but what the Bible is; the very nature of Scripture."<sup>41</sup>

Often, the debate of the proper view of revelation is waged within this kind of political struggle, and the politics of the Convention is where the debate is supposedly waged. Vines explains that "some think the whole debate about Bible inspiration is

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 36-8.

<sup>41</sup>Debra Mason, "Southern Baptist Leader Preaches Jesus, Not Politics," *Columbus Dispatch*, 12 November 1988, sec. A, p. 1.

merely a matter of semantics. We quibble with words, they say.” Yet, he continues, “Most assuredly, the issue is not merely semantic. The very life and health and future of the modern church is at stake.”<sup>42</sup> For Vines, the heart of the issue runs deeper than political differences between conservatives and moderates. It is more significant than the semantics of debate. The root of the issue concerns the power and authority of the Word of God.

### **Atonement**

Foundational to Vines’ theology of evangelism is the atoning work of Christ. This section will demonstrate that a survey of the corpus of his expository preaching highlights the frequency in which he preached this doctrine. In *Pierced for our Transgressions*, Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach define the doctrine of penal substitution: “God gave himself in the person of his Son to suffer instead of us the death, punishment, and curse due to fallen humanity as the penalty for sin.”<sup>43</sup> Vines affirms this definition as an acceptable way to describe his view of the nature of the atonement.<sup>44</sup> To grasp his understanding of the doctrine, this section examines his views of substitution, crucial words of atonement, extent of atonement, and salvation for the elect.

### **Substitution**

Vines’ preaching is dominated by the theme that Christ died on the cross as a substitute. In an exposition of 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, he offers the following definition:

Christ died for our sins. The word, ‘for,’ there means instead of. It means in place of. When Jesus died on the cross, the Bible says he was taking our place. He

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<sup>42</sup>Vines, *A Practical Guide*, 36.

<sup>43</sup>Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced For Our Transgressions*, 21.

<sup>44</sup>Telephone interview by author, 20 November 2007.

was our substitute. In the Old Testament they used animals for that purpose. They would take an animal and the person would lay his hands on that animal symbolically transferring his sins to the animal. Then they would take that animal out and put it to death. Slaughter it. That animal became the substitute. When Jesus died on the cross, He became our substitute. He took our place.<sup>45</sup>

The New Testament verifies that Christ died in the place of sinful humanity. It bridges together the work of Christ with the sacrificial system of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament preaching of Vines highlights the substitution motif in the Pentateuch. In Genesis 3:21, he sees substitution in God's provision of animal skins to cover Adam and Eve's shameful nakedness. He imagined that God sacrificed two lambs in front of humanity's first couple so they could understand the seriousness of their rebellion.<sup>46</sup> God's holiness required an atoning sacrifice in Adam and Eve's stead. In His holiness, God made the first sacrifice, incorporating substitution into the heart of the sacrificial system that He began. In His grace, He clothed His first two earthly children, ending their shame. God's grace and holiness intertwine to show God as not just the atonement's initiator, but also its finisher (Is 53:5).

Vines' exposition of Genesis 22:1-19 offers a typology of penal substitution. The account is charged with tension as God commands Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac. While explaining why God stays Abraham's knife-drawn hand, Vines declares:

When God stayed his hand he looked over there and the Bible says that this ram was caught in a thicket. He sees a thorn crowned lamb. He understands that God has provided a substitute for his own son. That's what the cross is all about. There is a difference at the cross of Calvary. For Abraham God substituted an animal for his son. When God let his own Son die on the cross of Calvary, the

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<sup>45</sup>Jerry Vines, "The Easter Good News: Christ Died for Our Sin" [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL on 9 April 1995; accessed 21 October 2006; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>46</sup>Jerry Vines, "Leaves or Skins" [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Genesis 3:24-30 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL; accessed 24 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

Heavenly Father substituted His Son for an animal and for you and for me. When Jesus died on the cross, you and I should have died there. It should have been me on that cross. It should have been you on that cross.<sup>47</sup>

He concludes that the ram in the thicket is a type of Christ, for this ram is sacrificed in the place of Isaac just as Christ is sacrificed in the place of man. This text is especially important to Vines, for he identifies it as the beginning place of what he metaphorically calls “the river of redemption.” This river begins atop Mt. Moriah, weaves its way through the temple sacrifices, and ends at the cross of Calvary.<sup>48</sup>

Moving to the book of Exodus, Vines finds substitution in three key places. These passages are indispensable to his doctrine of penal substitution, for they portray three Old Testament typologies in which Jesus becomes the substitutionary Passover lamb, mercy seat, and altar. First, he views Exodus 11 and 12 as foundational for Christ being the ultimate substitute Passover lamb. On the eve of the tenth plague that befell Egypt, God commanded the people of Israel to offer up sacrifices of unblemished, substitute lambs. The provision of these slain animals set apart the Israelites from the Egyptians so the death angel would pass over God’s people. From this text, Vines explains, “That night when that precious little lamb, that innocent victim was slain, the death of that lamb became the substitute for everybody that was in that house. That’s what we need. That’s what we have to have. We have to have a substitute.”<sup>49</sup> This first Passover is vital to his

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<sup>47</sup>Jerry Vines, “Isaac on the Altar” [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of a message on Genesis 22:1-19 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 5 May 2003; accessed 24 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>48</sup>Jerry Vines, “Why Did Jesus Die?” [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Romans 3:25; 5:8 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 19 May 2004; accessed 15 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>49</sup>Jerry Vines, “Are You Under the Blood?” [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Exodus 11-13 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL; accessed 16 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

understanding of atonement, for he explains, “We learn from the New Testament that Christ is our Passover. We learn that Christ is the Lamb. The blood of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of everything given to us in this twelfth chapter of the book of Exodus.”<sup>50</sup>

Second, Vines’ exposition of Exodus 25:17-22 explains that Jesus substitutes as our mercy seat. The Hebrew word כַּפֹּרֶת means “to cover or to make atonement.” It is the golden lid of the Ark of the Covenant that possesses two golden cherubim. He explains that on the Day of Atonement the priest was permitted to approach the ark and sprinkle the blood of the burnt offering on top of it. The mercy seat is the place on which atonement was made, for it was the place in which God’s holy law was satisfied. He states,

The word “propitiation” in the New Testament, is the word for mercy seat in the Old Testament. Jesus is the propitiation. When Jesus died on the cross he became our Mercy Seat. When God saw the blood He was satisfied. When Jesus died on the cross, He died for us. That’s substitution.<sup>51</sup>

This specific typology is a vital aspect of Vines’ view; he believes Jesus to be our Mercy Seat, for the cross is the ultimate place of atonement.

Third, Vines concludes from Exodus 30:1-10 that the sacrificial altar speaks of Jesus’ substitutionary work on the cross. The passage gives instruction of God’s requirements for the proper design, placement, and usage for a burnt offering altar. He explains the altar to be a place of fire and sacrifice, then says,

The altar is a picture of substitution. You know that you and I are saved on the basis of Jesus Christ being our substitute at the cross of Calvary. He who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. We are saved on the basis of a substitutionary atonement on the altar of Calvary. The altar

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Jerry Vines, “The Blood Sprinkled Mercy Seat” [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Exodus 25:17-22 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL; accessed 16 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

speaks of substitution.<sup>52</sup>

Vines' message entitled, "Yom Kippur," furthers his development of substitution. In Leviticus 16:7-22, Moses writes of God's command for Aaron, the High Priest, to select two substitutionary goats to make atonement for the sin of God's people. Aaron was to sacrifice one goat as a corporate sin offering. Then, he was to designate the second animal as the scapegoat in order to put away the Israelites' sin. Within this passage Vines asserts that the sacrificed goat made propitiation for the people, covering over their sin. He also concludes that the scapegoat is a picture of expiation, for the sin of the people is transferred upon the head of the goat. As it is sent away into the wilderness, the guilt of Israel's sin is removed.

Vines explains the inadequacy of the sacrificial system, for ultimately, the sin problem can only be solved by the adequacy of Christ. Rather than go to a tabernacle or temple to deal with the problem of our sin, Jesus is our temple. Instead of depending upon a high priest, who because of his depravity must offer sin offerings himself, we have a Great High Priest whose sinlessness requires no such sacrifice. Believers no longer need to transfer their sin upon the head of a scapegoat, for they now have Jesus, who through dying on the cross, "shed His blood not only to pay for our sins, but He became our scapegoat on the cross of Calvary and He literally put away our sins when He died. They are gone forever."<sup>53</sup>

Of all of Vines' preaching of atonement in the Old Testament, nowhere is he more explicit than in his sermon, "The Suffering Servant." While explaining the significance of the substitutionary language of Isaiah 53:5, he declares,

Verse 5 says, 'But he was wounded for our transgressions.' See the personal

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<sup>52</sup>Jerry Vines, "Scrub Up"[on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Exodus 30:17-21 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL on 21 September 2000; accessed 16 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>53</sup>Jerry Vines, "Yom Kippur" [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Leviticus 16-17 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 18 February 2004; accessed 16 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

pronouns. ‘He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.’ This is what you call the substitutionary atonement of Jesus. That means that He became our substitute. He took our place on the cross. When Jesus died on that cross, He was dying for all of our sins.<sup>54</sup>

Whether preaching through the Pentateuch or Isaiah’s prophecy, Vines believes substitution to be a replete motif found throughout the Old Testament.

Substitution is found in Vines’ preaching through both the Old and New Testaments. His Old Testament preaching on atonement always includes a bridge to the cross, but in much of his New Testament preaching, he reverses his approach, relying on Old Testament pictures to more fully explain the work of Christ.<sup>55</sup> For instance, a text that Vines uses to explain substitution is John 8:56: “Your father Abraham was overjoyed that he would see My day; he saw it and rejoiced.” His interpretation of this text places it within the Old Testament context of Abraham and Isaac’s experience atop Mt. Moriah in Genesis 22:1-19. He explains, “Do you remember that God provided a substitute lamb? When Abraham took that substitute lamb and put it in the place of his son, he got a glimpse of Calvary. He got a preview of what Jesus would one day do on the cross.”<sup>56</sup>

Vines looks to Paul’s letters to Corinth to further explain substitution. In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Vines speaks of the centrality of Christ’s substitutionary act in dying

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<sup>54</sup>Jerry Vines, “The Suffering Servant” [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 06 April 2005; accessed 16 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>55</sup>Jerry Vines, “Once for All” [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Hebrews 10:1-18 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 15 August 2001; accessed 16 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet. Vines explains, “He says in these opening statements that those Old Testament sacrifices were a shadow of good things to come, not the very image or the reality of those things. What is a shadow? It’s an image cast by an object. You walk along and you see your shadow. Your body casts a shadow. It is a representation of a reality. So, he’s saying the Old Testament sacrifices were shadows, but they were not the real things, just shadows of something that was on the way.”

<sup>56</sup>Jerry Vines, “Freed from the Curse!” [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Galatians 3:6-14 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 18 September 2002; accessed 16 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

for our sins. The Old Testament used substitutionary animals, symbolically transferring a person's sins to the animal. Where animals were once used to be man's substitute, Jesus, in dying on the cross, became the final substitute.<sup>57</sup> In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Vines contends that in becoming man's substitute, what Jesus did for humanity was more costly than if He had become a sinner, for this passage reveals that Christ actually became sin. He explains, "When Jesus bore our sins on the cross, the Bible does not say He was made a sinner. It's even worse than that. He was not just made a sinner. He was made SIN for us. Him who knew no sin [was] made sin for us."<sup>58</sup>

In Galatians 3:13, Vines asserts that it is the substitutionary work of Christ that satisfies God's holy law. God's law requires perfect obedience, but since humanity is born into sin, no one is able to meet God's standard. Therefore, Jesus became man's curse and died on a cross. By becoming the Mercy Seat, Christ came between a holy God and sinful man, and the wrath that would have fallen against man fell upon Christ. Vines explains, "That's why He was dying on the cross, to be our substitute and to take our place."<sup>59</sup>

In Philemon Vines explains that the only way believers stand before God with a free and clear account of sin is through Christ's work on the cross. It was in this place of atonement that Jesus took man's unrighteousness upon himself, exchanging man's account of sin with His account of righteousness:

You see, that is exactly the gospel of substitution. It is the gospel that Jesus Christ has had put down on His account all of our sins for Him to pay. We stand in the presence of God free and clear, as if we had never sinned. Not one blemish against

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<sup>57</sup>Vines, "The Easter Good News."

<sup>58</sup>Jerry Vines, "Get Right With God" [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL on 11 August 1985; accessed 17 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>59</sup>Vines, "Free from the Curse!"

our record. That's substitution. That's what Christ did for us.<sup>60</sup>

Of all the New Testament texts that speak of substitution, three passages that Vines believes capture it most clearly are found in 1 Peter. 1 Peter 2:24a says, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree." He explains, "To me, that teaches the vicarious nature of his suffering. He bore our sins; the picture is a priest carrying the sacrifice on the altar. The priest would carry the sins in the body of the animal. Christ carried our sins in his body."<sup>61</sup> In 1 Peter 3:18, Christ's suffering once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, is enough to convince him, "That's the doctrine of substitution."<sup>62</sup> In an exposition of 1 Peter 4:1-6, he asserts that believers do not need to be dominated by sin because of the doctrine of substitution. God's remedy for sin is death, and through the death of Christ, the power of sin in a believer's life is broken.<sup>63</sup> From cover to cover, in the Scriptures, Vines views substitution as a major theme of the Bible.

### **Crucial Words of Atonement**

A key element of Vines view of atonement is that Jesus died on a cross in man's stead, but substitution is not enough to assert that anyone holds definitively to penal substitution.<sup>64</sup> There must be more within the content of one's teaching on the cross

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<sup>60</sup>Jerry Vines, "Put That On My Account" [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Philemon delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL; accessed 17 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>61</sup>Jerry Vines, telephone interview by author, 20 November 2007.

<sup>62</sup>Jerry Vines, "I'm Not That Way Anymore," [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of 1 Peter 4:1-6 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville FL 5 December 2004; accessed 17 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Gregory A. Boyd, "The Christus Victor Response," *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 99. Boyd advocates a Christus Victor view of atonement. He rejects Schreiner's penal substitution view, but applauds him for capturing the "central

to truly understand the far reaching ramifications of Christ's substitutionary work. Crucial biblical words that are rightly defined must be found in one's preaching to truly show an orthodox view of penal substitution.<sup>65</sup> My analysis of Vines' sermons reveals that redemption, justification, reconciliation, and propitiation are the crucial biblical words he uses most often, making them quintessential to his view of atonement.

Redemption is a vital word in Vines' view of atonement. He states,

The message of the Bible is the message of the shed-blood of the Lord Jesus Christ for our redemption from cover to cover. It starts in the Garden of Eden where an animal sacrifice was made so that clothes could be made for Adam and Eve to be clothed and covered over. It goes all the way to the end of the book of the Revelation where it talks about the fact that God has redeemed us by His own precious blood. It's a book of redemption. It's a blood book.<sup>66</sup>

Redemption, for Vines, means to set free by the payment of a price. Its significance is most clearly seen within a discussion of slavery. When a slave was on the slave block to be purchased by its future owner, the transaction required that the future owner be willing to pay the redemption price.<sup>67</sup> This payment is paid by Jesus because every member of humanity is born into the slave market of sin.<sup>68</sup>

Vines' definition of redemption emphasizes that the commodity Jesus uses to pay the price of sin is that of His own blood. Explaining Hebrews 9:22, he concludes that

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importance of Christ's substitutionary death."

<sup>65</sup>Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 7. This section is guided by Morris' identification of the words of atonement crucial to understanding the New Testament. The two words found in Morris' work not addressed in this section are "covenant," and "the blood."

<sup>66</sup>Jerry Vines, "Scrub Up."

<sup>67</sup>Jerry Vines, "Get Right With God" [on-line]; sermon manuscript of an exposition of 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 11 August 1985; accessed 2 December 2010; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>68</sup> Jerry Vines, "Baptist Battles: Calvinism." In this sermon, Vines confirms that humanity is born into sin.

forgiveness of sins can only come through the shedding of Christ's precious blood: "That is why Jesus had to die on the cross. He was paying the price for all of your sin."<sup>69</sup>

Elsewhere he states: "The Bible says we have redemption. That means that Jesus came and with His own blood, with the price of His own blood, paid our purchase price."<sup>70</sup>

Redemption as found in his interpretation of Hebrews 10:2-4 depends upon an atemporal understanding of time for atonement. He juxtaposes the insufficient provision of the sacrificial system with the sufficient provision of the atoning work of Christ. While explaining the text, he asserts, "In the Old Testament the sins of the people were just tacked on year after year. Those sins were never cleansed. They were only covered. They were pushed forward every year, but then Christ came He made a once for all payment and when He did, our sin debt was paid in full."<sup>71</sup> This view stresses that the sufficient work of Christ in atonement did not become a reality for Old Testament saints until the passing of the actual crucifixion and resurrection events. Vines concludes that Jesus is the final, ultimate sacrifice. The redemptive payment of His blood pays for the sin of the past, present, and future in full.<sup>72</sup>

Vines closely relates redemption to justification. It is the redeeming work of Christ in paying the price for our sins that is the basis for a believer's justification.<sup>73</sup> He

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<sup>69</sup>Jerry Vines, "The High Cost of Sin," [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Psalm 51 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 15 May 2005; accessed 22 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>70</sup>Jerry Vines, "Going to Heaven God's Way," [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Romans 3:21-26 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 13 February 2000; accessed 22 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>71</sup>Vines, "Once for All."

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Vines, "Freed from the Curse!"

avows that justification is one of the key words of the Bible. To justify means, “to declare righteous.” He further explained, “When you are saved you are justified. You are declared righteous before God. It is His righteousness placed on us.”<sup>74</sup> One of his clearest explanations for justification is found in an exposition of Romans 3:21-26:

The first word “justified” is a picture that’s taken from the legal world. The word “justification” is a word that means “to declare righteous.” Here’s the picture. You are in a courtroom. You are standing before the judge. Your case has already been presented. There is no question about it. You are absolutely guilty. They have the facts. They have all of the evidence. All of the exhibits are there. There you stand before the judge. Then, yet, right there in the midst of the fact that you are guilty, you are declared “not guilty.” You are acquitted of your sin and your rendered acceptable unto God. What in the world could do that for us? When Jesus died on the cross, the Bible says He took all of our sin. All your iniquity was laid on Him. He who was without sin was made sin for us. All of your sins you have ever committed or ever will commit were laid on the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus paid the price for your sins, when you by faith receive that price of payment for your sins, God says to you--you are no longer guilty, the price has been paid. That’s what salvation is. I’m a sinner. I deserve to pay the price. I know I’m guilty. Jesus comes along and on the cross of Calvary, Jesus says, “I’ll pay it for them.”<sup>75</sup>

As he explained the doctrine of justification above, he could not help but intertwine the redeeming act of Jesus paying the price for our sins.

Reconciliation is another key term to understanding Vines’ view of atonement. He taught that the word has an etymological history grounded in the marketplace. It was originally used by money changers to exchange something of equal value. As the word’s meaning developed, “The word came to mean the adjustment of a difference. Here are two, and they have a difference with one another. That difference is adjusted, they are brought back into harmony, they are reconciled. The word, reconciliation, came to mean to restore to favor.”<sup>76</sup>

A striking feature of his explanation of New Testament reconciliation is how it overcomes the infinite distance that separates man and God caused by sin. He comments

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Vines, “Going to Heaven.”

<sup>76</sup>Vines, “Get Right with God.”

on Philemon 12, 15, and 17:

Three times in the letter Paul says to Philemon, receive him, receive him, receive him as myself. That's a picture of what Jesus does. That's a picture of the gospel. Here I stand before God as an alien. Here I stand before God as an enemy of God. Estranged from God because of sin. An infinite distance from a holy God because of my sin. Unworthy to stand in the presence of God and yet the Lord Jesus comes along side of me and brings me to the Father, and he says, "Father receive him as myself."<sup>77</sup>

Vines concludes that reconciliation consists of two parties opposed to one another as enemies ending their enmity and becoming friends. In his message "Reconciled!" he makes a direct connection between reconciliation and Christ's atoning work: "The Bible says because of what Jesus did on the cross of Calvary you and I who were enemies of God have now been reconciled."<sup>78</sup>

A final crucial term prevalent in Vines' preaching on atonement is propitiation. In 1 John, he defines it as,

The word, propitiation, means the satisfaction. It means the atoning sacrifice. The picture is not that God is like an angry person who has to be appeased. The picture is that the holy law of God had to be satisfied. Jesus satisfied God's law. That word "propitiation" means "mercy seat." It is saying that Jesus Christ is our mercy seat. It means that Jesus came between us and the wrath of God. God has to punish sin. So when Jesus died on the cross, God's holy wrath was poured upon Him. All of the wrath you and I should have had fell on Jesus at the cross of Calvary. The cross is our mercy seat.<sup>79</sup>

When proclaiming the meaning of propitiation, he clearly sees the need for sin's penalty to be satisfied.<sup>80</sup> Also, in claiming Christ to be the mercy seat, he believes Jesus to have taken the full extent of the Father's wrath. He explains that in the same way

<sup>77</sup>Vines, "Put That on My Account."

<sup>78</sup>Jerry Vines, "Reconciled!" [on-line]; sermon manuscript of an exposition of Colossians 1:20-23 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL on 08 February 1998; accessed 22 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>79</sup>Jerry Vines, "Love is the Theme" [on-line]; sermon manuscript of an exposition of 1 John 4:7-16 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL; accessed 14 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>80</sup>Vines, "Why did Jesus Die?"

the mercy seat is beaten into form, Jesus, on the cross, was beaten by the Father's wrath,

You will notice also in verse 18 it says that it is to be a 'beaten work.' That means it was to be hammered. It was a hammered piece of furniture. Evidently it was hammered in such a way that it was smoothed out in a slab and then on the ends, out of that solid piece of gold, were these unusual, mysterious creatures known as the Cherubim. This pictures to us the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. It was through the hammering Jesus experienced in Gethsemane, and at Calvary, that Jesus Christ did the work to make it possible for you and me to meet a holy God at His throne. The mercy seat. The meeting place with God.<sup>81</sup>

Vines understands this hammering of Jesus to be the work of God against sin. Because of sin, the justice of God required sin to be dealt with; thus the Father hammered His Son on a cross.

God's holiness requires wrath. Vines does not believe God capable of being a loving Father if incapable of wrath. In his wrath, "All our sins, all the sins you ever have committed, ever will commit, all the sins of the world were laid on Jesus Christ. When Jesus was made sin for us God's holy wrath smashed our sins in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He's our Mercy Seat. God's law is satisfied."<sup>82</sup>

### **Extent of Atonement**

Thus far, this chapter demonstrates that Vines holds to penal substitutionary atonement. His preaching is saturated with the motif of substitution and with key words essential to New Testament atonement. He agrees with Thomas Schreiner, that "the theory of penal substitution is the heart and soul of an evangelical view of the atonement."<sup>83</sup> I will now shift from the nature of the atonement to matters surrounding its extent. Vines holds to general redemption.<sup>84</sup> He declares, "I'll live by this statement: God

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<sup>81</sup>Vines, "The Blood Sprinkled Mercy Seat."

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, "Penal Substitution View," *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, ed. by James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 67.

<sup>84</sup>A more complete definition of general redemption found to be in agreement with Vines' view is: "The doctrine of general redemption argues that the death of Christ

sent Him [Jesus] to be the Savior of the World. He died for everybody in the world.”<sup>85</sup>

Several key texts support his statement. For instance, while preaching out of Isaiah 53:6, he comments, “Take all of the sins of the world, all of the sins that have been committed by every person who has ever lived or will ever live in history, that huge unbelievable bundle of sin was laid on the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>86</sup> Vines believes that when God laid upon the Suffering Servant the iniquity of us all, that meant that Christ died for the sin of the world.

He cites two passages in John’s gospel to support his statement. In John 1:29, John the Baptist declares Jesus to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.<sup>87</sup> In John 3:16, God gave His one and only Son to the world because the world is the object of His love.<sup>88</sup> His exegesis of Hebrews 2:9 is that Jesus was made a little lower than the angels for a short time that by the grace of God he should taste death for every man.<sup>89</sup> 1 John 2:2 is yet another text that Vines uses to support his statement, for Christ is the propitiation “for our sins and not for ours only, but for the sins of the world.”<sup>90</sup> In

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was designed to include all mankind, whether or not all believe. To those who savingly believe it is redemptively applied, and to those who do not believe it provides the benefits of common grace and the removal of any excuse for being lost.” W. A. Elwell, “Extent of the Atonement,” in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 99.

<sup>85</sup>Vines, “Love is the Theme.”

<sup>86</sup>Vines, “The Suffering Servant.”

<sup>87</sup>Jerry Vines, “Baptist Battles: Calvinism.”

<sup>88</sup>Jerry Vines, “Seminary in a Nutshell,” audio recorded message of an exposition of John 3:16 delivered at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary on 11 September 1997; audiocassette.

<sup>89</sup>Jerry Vines, “Baptist Battles.”

<sup>90</sup>Jerry Vines, “You Can Win Over Sin” [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of 1 John 1:5-2:2 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 19

light of these interpretations, he concludes, “There is no way you can monkey with the text and play exegetical games and get around the fact that the Bible teaches that when Jesus died on the cross, he died for the sin of the whole world.”<sup>91</sup>

When Vines interprets the passages mentioned above, he sees no compelling reason to exegete these passages out of their normal sense.<sup>92</sup> His interpretation of the Scriptures not only explains why he holds to a general redemption, but it also serves as his primary rebuttal against particular redemption. To this argument he adds two additional supports for general atonement.

One of his supports is his explanation that certain passages of Scripture do *seem* to limit the extent of the atonement. For instance, he cites Matthew 1:21, “He will save *His people* [emphasis mine] from their sins.” He points to Acts 20:28, which states that Christ purchased *the church* [emphasis mine] with his own blood. Third, he mentions Mark 10:45, that Jesus gave his life as a ransom for *many* [emphasis mine]. He correctly admits that these passages use language that appears restrictive, yet he warns, “Do not restrict the love of God because of some specific point in Scripture that the language does not make it all encompassing.”<sup>93</sup> For illustration purposes, consider the following argument. When one speaks of caring for a certain married couple without mentioning their children, it does not likely mean that person does not also love their children.<sup>94</sup> So it

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January 1997; accessed 22 November 2007; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>91</sup>Vines, “Baptist Battles.”

<sup>92</sup>Elwell, “Extent,” 99. I borrow the term “normal sense” from Elwell who defines the “normal sense” of the word *all* as, “When the Bible says Christ died for all it means just that.”

<sup>93</sup>Vines, “Baptist Battles.”

<sup>94</sup>Ibid. Robert Lightner articulates this same argument in Robert Lightner, *The Death Christ Died*, 62. He states, “The Bible does speak of the atonement in relation to

is with the atonement. The passages given above are not intended to limit its extent.

Another way that Vines supports his general view of atonement is by assigning failure to an unbeliever for dying in his sins. A Calvinist might argue that general atonement makes Christ a failure. If Christ died for the sin of the world and not everyone in the world is saved, then Christ's redeeming work somehow failed those who die in unbelief. Vines responds that when persons do not believe, Jesus is not the one who fails, but it is the unbeliever who fails. He uses an illustration of a generous host inviting a large number of people to a restaurant. If he prepays for twenty persons' meals and only fifteen persons attend the dinner, he cannot be blamed for those who did not partake. Rather, the failure falls upon the five who rejected the generous offer.<sup>95</sup>

### **Salvation for the Elect**

The nature of the atonement, for Vines, is that Christ died a penal substitutionary death on a cross. The extent of the atonement is that Jesus' death is for the sin of the world. Though Christ died for the world, Vines does not believe that everyone in the world receives the salvific benefit of Christ's death.

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specific individuals and groups. And the unlimited redemptionist has absolutely no problem reconciling all such references in his view. It should be understood that none of the passages which speak of Christ's death for specific groups or individuals can be used to exclude others."

<sup>95</sup>Ibid. Millard Erickson articulates a helpful nuance of this argument in Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 851. He reasons, "The underlying issue here is the question of the efficacy of the atonement. Those who hold to limited atonement assume that if Christ died for someone, that person will actually be saved. By extension they reason that if Christ in fact died for all persons, all would come to salvation; hence the concept of universal atonement is viewed as leading to the universal-salvation trap. The basic assumption here, however, ignores the fact that our inheriting eternal life involves two separate factors: an objective factor (Christ's provision of salvation) and a subjective factor (our acceptance of that salvation). In the view of those who hold to unlimited atonement, there is the possibility that someone for whom salvation is available may fail to accept it. In the view of those who hold to limited atonement, however, there is no such possibility."

Vines places everyone into one of two camps. A person is either lost, or a person is saved. If a person is lost, this person is presently under the curse of God. In commenting on John 3:36, Vines concludes, “What does it mean to be lost? It means to be under the curse right now. The wrath of God is hanging over you right now.”<sup>96</sup> If this cursed individual never receives saving faith, the person will spend an eternity in hell.

Vines leaves no room for universalism. He views the atonement to be of infinite value, able to redeem the entire world. Yet, salvation comes only to those to whose lives the atoning work of Christ has been applied. The clearest statement that he offers is that “the death of Jesus Christ is sufficient for the sin of the world, but it is efficient only for they who will receive it.”<sup>97</sup> Pointing to 1 Timothy 4:10 he explains his position,

Why isn't everybody saved then? I Timothy 4 explains it for us. Verse 10 says, “We trust in the living God who is the Savior of all men, especially of those that believe.” He is the Savior of all men. That is potentially. The blood of Jesus Christ is powerful enough to cleanse the sins of the whole world. His blood paid the price for the sins of the whole world. Potentially the whole world can be saved. Actually he says, “especially of these that believe.” What you have to do to have the Savior is receive Him. What you have to do to be saved is to receive that salvation.<sup>98</sup>

They who receive salvation are called the elect. They are not saved in their own effort, for he asserts:

Election is that divine act of God's will whereby He chose to save you before the foundation of the world. Before this world came into existence, before you were born, the Bible says that God by an act of His divine will chose to save you. As a saved person, you are now a part of the elect. It is a precious truth. It is a wonderful truth. It means that you and I have no part to play in terms of saving ourselves. It means that God did the work of salvation. We are saved, not dependent upon ourselves. We are saved because of what God has done for us. That means you and

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<sup>96</sup>Vines, “Freed from the Curse!”

<sup>97</sup>Vines, “Baptist Battles.”

<sup>98</sup>Vines, “Love is the Theme.”

I have no part in our salvation in terms of earning or meriting that salvation.<sup>99</sup>

Vines' definition of the doctrine of election, as stated above, would satisfy most Calvinists. But as has previously been established in this chapter, satisfying the theological convictions of anyone who accepts a particular label to define their doctrinal convictions is of little concern to Vines. He finds this definition to be biblical. He believes the atonement of Christ is infinite in value, potentially capable of saving the world. Yet, the work of Christ is applied only to the elect.

### **Pneumatology**

The theological underpinnings of Vines' approach to evangelism include a developed pneumatology. In Vines' theology, all three members of the Godhead are actively involved in the work of Salvation. God the Father is the originator of the plan of salvation. Vines likens him to a doctor who prescribes the remedy for humanity's depravity. God the Son fulfills the mediating role of salvation, for it is through his death on the cross that the price was paid that makes salvation possible. Comparing the work of salvation to the medical field, Vines sees Jesus as the pharmacist who prepares the remedy for humanity's disease of sin. It is the work of the Holy Spirit who administers salvation in the heart of a believer. He is the nurse who applies the remedy.<sup>100</sup>

Associated with the work of the members of the Trinity are three dispensations that Vines interprets from Scripture that lend understanding to how God has worked throughout human history. The period of history in which the Old Testament was written was the age of the Father. The New Testament was the age of the Son. Since the Day of

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<sup>99</sup>Jerry Vines, "Christianity 101: Election and Evangelism" [on-line]; sermon manuscript of message delivered 11 June 2003; accessed 21 October 2006; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>100</sup>Jerry Vines, *Spirit Life* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 13.

Pentecost to the present, we are in the age of the Holy Spirit. These dispensations do not mean the Holy Spirit was not present in the world prior to the day of Pentecost, but they do indicate the Father has given the Holy Spirit to the world in this present dispensation in a special and unusual way largely for the purpose of the evangelization of humanity.<sup>101</sup>

This present age of the Holy Spirit is a dispensation in which the Spirit uses the witness of believers as He administers salvation to cursed humanity. Simultaneously, He actively restrains evil within the world (Isa 59:19). Vines sees the special and unusual ways that the Spirit presently works in the aforementioned examples, but he finds that Scripture teaches that this era will one day end. Second Thessalonians 2:6-8 predicts that one day the Holy Spirit will withdraw his restraining work from the world. In that day, the world will plunge into total depravity and ruin.<sup>102</sup> Until then, believers are called to witness in the Spirit's power so the work of evangelism can be fulfilled. The Spirit's administering work in this present dispensation consists of conviction, regeneration, and protection. He accomplishes this work through the witness of believers whom he controls.

### **Conviction**

Vines attributes the work of conviction of sin to the Holy Spirit, because he believes "the Bible makes it very clear that only the Holy Spirit can convict us that we are sinners." Through confronting human hearts as "the convicter," the Holy Spirit does for an unsaved individual what another person is incapable of doing. Through exposing a person's sin, He convinces the unsaved person of his need of salvation.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 47-48.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 48- 49.

Vines explains from John 16:9 that Jesus specifically taught the Holy Spirit is the agent of conviction. During his public ministry, Jesus, in his incarnate form, acted as this agent. For instance, after convicting Peter of the depths of his sin, the disciple responded in Luke 5:8, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” In John 8:8, it was the convicting power of Jesus that convinced the judgmental Pharisees to drop their stones. Yet after the resurrection, when the disciples, who had yet to receive the power of the Spirit, sought to convict Thomas that Jesus was alive, they failed. To their chagrin, they could not do as Jesus had done for Peter and the Pharisees. But after the Day of Pentecost, it only took one disciple, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to convict thousands of their sin and need for salvation (Acts 2:37).<sup>104</sup> The particular target of the Spirit’s convicting work in the life of a nonbeliever is his sin of rejecting Christ as Savior.

### **Regeneration**

Another key way the Holy Spirit works in salvation is through regeneration. Vines defines it as “God imparting divine life to the person who receives Jesus as personal Savior.” It simply means to be born again.<sup>105</sup>

Vines finds in one sense, the Holy Spirit is involved in every person’s physical birth. Job 33:4 says, “The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.” The presence of God in the mother’s womb in Psalm 139:15,16 speaks of the Spirit’s role in a person’s physical birth, but in a more specific sense, salvation requires one to be born again, for in so doing he is born of the Spirit. When this rebirth occurs, salvation springs forth from a new life.<sup>106</sup> Vines admits there to be a mystery of how one

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 54.

is born again, but the result of the Spirit's regenerative work is that He makes you completely new. He explains,

When God saved you, when the Spirit of God breathed you into the family of God, he didn't try to change the old you into a new you. He didn't try to improve you or patch you up. But when you receive Christ as your Savior, you are Spirit-born. You get a brand new life—a totally new you.<sup>107</sup>

Thus, Vines ascribes credit to the Holy Spirit for convicting a person of his or her lost condition. Then when a Christian witnesses and the plan of salvation is given, the Holy Spirit does the work of regeneration as the person becomes a believer.

### **Protection**

An ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers is His work of protection. This is the work that is commonly referred to as a believer's eternal security. There are two symbols that Vines finds in Paul's writings that speak of the Spirit's protection. First, there is the symbol of earnest. According to 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5, and Ephesians 1:14, the Holy Spirit, from the moment of a Christian's new birth, gives a believer an earnest that can never be rebuked.<sup>108</sup> It is very much like earnest money that is put down on a house that promises that the full amount is on the way. Vines explains, "We receive Jesus as our Savior. God slips on the ring (the Holy Spirit in our hearts). This is His powerful promise and pledge that He will protect us until He comes again for us."<sup>109</sup>

A second symbol that speaks of the Spirit's work of protection is the picture of a believer's being sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:30; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22). Vines interprets the biblical meaning of the word seal to point to the idea of ownership. He explains, "To

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 58.

put a seal on something means it's yours...The Spirit's presence is God's seal which says, 'That belongs to me. I own that one. He is valuable to me!'" Furthermore, a seal indicates a finished transaction. The deal is done. God has drawn up the terms of salvation and when a person trusts Christ as Savior, the terms of salvation are cemented.<sup>110</sup>

The Holy Spirit's cementing work allows a believer to trust that his salvation is eternally secure. Vines posits: "As a born again child of God you are eternally secure and there is no doubt about it."<sup>111</sup> He draws a clear distinction between a believer's security and assurance. Every person is secure, he reasons, but not every person is sure. Thus, one might lose a subjective feeling of eternal assurance because of sin. But since security is based on the unassisted work that God accomplishes in his work of salvation, the doctrine of forensic righteousness insures that a believer's salvation is unchanged. His works play no part in the securing of his salvation.<sup>112</sup>

Vines appeals to the facts of Scripture to support his position that a believer's salvation remains secure. He translates the Greek use of the double negative in John 10:28 to assert that when God gives a believer eternal life, he will "never, no never perish." According to Philippians 1:6, God completes the work that He begins in the life of every believer. Romans 8:29 explains that God predestines that every believer will

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 58-59.

<sup>111</sup>Jerry Vines, "No Doubt About It" [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Hebrews 6:17-19 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 25 April 1999; accessed 1 December 2010; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet. In this message, Vines asserts that the believer's assurance empowers his evangelistic witness. He reasons that a believer cannot share Christ effectively without the certainty of knowing he is saved.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid. Vines does not use the term "forensic righteousness" in this particular sermon, but I find it to be an appropriate term to use when describing his view. God's declaration of a believer's righteousness is matter of faith, not works. Likewise, Vines' view of eternal security does not involve a believer's works.

become like Jesus. Since every believer is kept by the power of God (1 Peter 1:5) and nothing can snatch a believer from the Father's hand, salvation is not about a believer's hold on God. Rather, God founds it on His hold on us. Thus, God purposes a believer's security. He provides it by the Son. And the Holy Spirit grants eternal life to every believer in whose heart He resides forever.<sup>113</sup>

### **Control**

Vines believes that the Spirit's work in evangelism occurs most freely when believers who desire to be used evangelistically are under His control. He finds Ephesians 5:18 to be a key text of what it means to be controlled by the Spirit. He explains that in the same way that a person can be controlled and changed by alcoholic drink, a person can be controlled and changed by the Holy Spirit. When a believer lives under the Spirit's control, he becomes a tool that the Spirit fills with power to win people to Christ.<sup>114</sup>

Vines explains that throughout his ministry he has consistently sought to be controlled by the Spirit. He recalls times when he's been in witnessing situations in which he was asked difficult questions and left surprised by the statements he made. There have been other times that the Spirit has empowered him with boldness to share the gospel when he experienced fear. He admits, "I never try to preach unless I have asked for a new supply of the Holy Spirit's power. I do not go on visitation unless I ask the

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid. For an engaging treatment of the doctrines of perseverance and assurance of the saints that Vines would applaud, see Kenneth D. Keathley, "Perseverance and Assurance of the Saints," in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Academic, 2010), 163-87. He interacts with views from historical and contemporary theologians and proposes what he calls, "A Variation of the Evidence-of-Genuineness Position." His view has four points: (1) the only basis for assurance is the objective work of Christ; (2) assurance is the essence of saving faith; (3) saving faith perseveres, and (4) God offers rewards available to the believer subsequent to salvation.

<sup>114</sup>Vines, *Spirit Life*, 62.

Holy Spirit to fill me and help me say the right thing.”<sup>115</sup> Vines’ pneumatology, as he daily applied it to his life, is largely responsible for the evangelistic focus that he has maintained throughout his ministry.

### **Soteriology**

Vines asserts that salvation is one of the great comprehensive themes of the Bible. Thus, the main purpose of God’s Word is to bring people to faith in Christ so they are saved from sin and to eternal life.<sup>116</sup> The following summary of Vines’ soteriology is organized by his categorical explanations of two points of view of salvation, the salvation package, total depravity, and foreknowledge.

#### **Two Points of View**

Understanding Vines’ soteriology begins with the distinction he offers of two points of view of salvation. He explains:

Sometimes when you read the Bible on the subject of salvation you will see it from the divine perspective, from God's point of view. When you study it from that perspective you will run into things like election, foreknowledge, predestination. From the divine point of view salvation is all of God. The Bible says that if you are saved God saw you from all eternity. The Bible says if you are saved that God predestined you - you were elected to be a part of His family. So, from the divine perspective salvation is all of God. Then when you study the Bible on the subject of salvation you will also find that the Bible presents salvation from the human perspective or from man’s point of view. When you study it from that perspective you will find statements like this: Repent and believe the Gospel. The Bible talks about people repenting. The Bible talks about people trusting Christ - receiving Christ - believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. You will find statements like this: whosoever will, let him come. Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely. So, salvation, though it began with God, has a very practical ultimate point in that the purpose of it is that people might come to know Christ in a personal kind of way.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 25 August 2009.

<sup>116</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 17 August 2006.

<sup>117</sup>Jerry Vines, “Full Salvation” [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Romans 6:22 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 18

The distinction he draws between these points of view is how he maintains a theological tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. He has an aversion to asserting a logical relationship between the perspectives, for this explanation would lead him to affirm one of salvation's points of view at the expense of the other. God's point of view, less that of man's, leads to a cold determinism. When the opposite happens, a saved person diminishes God's sovereignty by taking credit for something that only God can do.

Accepting the tension is what allows him to maintain a balanced pursuit of a biblical theology. It leads Vines to the following conclusions. Election for salvation is unconditional and is a part of God's perspective, but from man's perspective, it comes by faith. Salvation is granted by way of a person's faith (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Man freely chooses to exercise his will in harmony with or against the will of God. One way God exercises His sovereignty is that He has chosen to give man the free will to choose Him.

### **The Salvation Package**

Vines insists that several doctrinal truths are a part of the "salvation package."<sup>118</sup> Regeneration, justification, and conversion all occur the moment a person becomes a Christian. Thus, Vines rejects the Reformed position on *ordo solutis*. This issue is a significant matter of his theology, for he delineates himself from any who believes it important to order regeneration before the reception of saving faith.<sup>119</sup> If

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October 1995; accessed 7 October 2010; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>118</sup>Vines, "Baptist Battles: Calvinism."

<sup>119</sup>Since Vines rejects the Reformed *ordo solutis* based on his view that it nullifies faith, one might assume he would argue that conversion precedes regeneration. Yet, I have not found in Vines' writing or preaching that he ever takes such a position. His position is that the salvation package happens simultaneously, thus conversion and regeneration happen simultaneously. He would be more inclined to agree with the

regeneration does precede faith, then he questions what faith accomplishes. To protect against the nullification of faith, he cautions that the Calvinistic understanding of the order of salvation can lead to the theological error that one can be born again before one possesses saving faith. He draws from Galatians 3:26 that a believer's status as a son of God comes through faith. The right to become children of God is only given to those who believe in His name (John 1:12).<sup>120</sup>

Sanctification is another part of the salvation package. Words like regeneration, justification, and conversion describe what happened in the past for a believer when he became a Christian. These words make it theologically correct for a believer to declare, "I have been saved." But it is sanctification that describes what happens in the present. Its truth makes it theologically correct to say, "I am being saved," and that the present aspect of salvation in the life of a believer is a process. Vines reasons,

Do you know why he uses the picture here of fruit in talking about your salvation in the present life? It's that fruit takes a period of time. You don't just go out in the back yard and just flip an apple seed into the dirt and kick a little dirt over it and then the next morning go out and pluck an apple off the tree. It doesn't work that way. The apple seed is planted and the sprout comes up and then the tree begins to grow and then the next thing you know there are bunches of apples on the tree. There has to be a process. Salvation in the present life of a believer is a process.<sup>121</sup>

The process of which Vines describes is what happens when one who is truly saved

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position of Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 43, who asserts that *ordo solutis* "must not be viewed simplistically as a linear sequence of chronological occurrences," but he would disagree Demarest that the *ordo* must be viewed as a logical as well as a chronological relation. The salvation package occurs simultaneously, and its logic should be thought of in like fashion. In maintaining his simultaneous view, Vines seeks protection from the nullification of saving faith.

<sup>120</sup>Vines, "Baptist Battles: Calvinism."

<sup>121</sup>Vines, "Full Salvation."

increases in his freedom from sin and submission to God. It is a Christian's "progressive growth in righteousness,"<sup>122</sup> the continuation of salvation that marks him throughout the entirety of his Christian life.

Glorification is the final aspect of the salvation package. In this part, a believer experiences the fullness of salvation in eternal life. Where sanctification makes it correct for a believer to declare, "I am being saved," it is glorification that validates the declaration, "I will be saved." Glorification frees one from the presence of sin. It fulfills the process of making a person into a servant of God.<sup>123</sup>

### **Total Depravity**

Foundational to his soteriology is Vines' doctrine of sin. He believes that everyone is born with a sin nature. Every facet of a person's being is stained and damaged by sin. There is not an aspect of one's personality that is not totally depraved. A key text that employs the metaphor of deadness is Ephesians 2:1. Every sinner is born in a state of spiritual deadness, and it is the work of God that turns one from a state of deadness to being made spiritually alive in Christ Jesus.

While he firmly holds to the doctrine of total depravity, he does espouse that it is possible to take Paul's metaphor of being spiritually dead too far. For example, if a person holds that total depravity means that man is incapable of repenting and trusting Christ, then the holder of that view has gone beyond Paul's intended use of the metaphor. Vines argues that his view of deadness is consistent with his theology, yet he neglects to see that based on his logic, the same deadness also makes it impossible for a dead man to sin.

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

Vines rejects a view that would surmise that a person is incapable of doing anything in his deadness. Moreover, if dead men cannot repent, and God commands all men to repent (Acts 17:30), it brings into question the character of God. Vines finds it inconceivable that God would ask an unregenerate person to do that of which he is incapable.<sup>124</sup>

The best way to describe Vines' soteriological view of how depraved persons move from death to life is through assisting grace.<sup>125</sup> Vines references the prodigal son as an example of his view. While the son was dead and lost, he came to himself, repented, and returned to his father. The father celebrated his aliveness in that he who had been lost was found (Luke 15:17-24). Along with this example, Vines cites John 5:40 to highlight the willful decision of persons who refuse Christ's offer of eternal life. He concludes that

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<sup>124</sup>Jerry Vines, "Baptist Battles: Calvinism." While Vines never specifically defined the parameters of how far to take the metaphor of deadness in Ephesians 2:1, He agrees with Steve W. Lemke's explanation: "Calvinists base much of their teachings on Ephesians 2:1, that those who are lost are 'dead in trespasses and sin.' However, they tend to equate spiritual deadness with physical deadness and do not qualify this spiritual deadness in the light of other descriptions of lostness even in the same chapter. Ephesians 2 also speaks of the lost as 'foreigners' and 'aliens' (Ephesians 2:12,19). Foreigners do not enjoy citizenship and are far from God, but foreigners are still alive. Ephesians 2:1 is further qualified by 1 Corinthians 1:18 ("the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (HCSB)), and 2 Corinthians 4:3 ("And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing (NASB)). The concept of spiritual deadness is present in all three passages, but the deadness is not yet complete. The lost are perishing but not yet dead. Opportunity remains for a response that can result in a different destiny." Steven Lemke, "A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace" in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Academic, 2010), 135.

<sup>125</sup>Lemke, "A Biblical and Theological Critique," 159-60. Since Lemke offered this definition in a book that was written in conjunction with a conference Vines organized and invited Lemke as a guest lecturer/writer, his explanation of assisting grace is likely harmonious with Vines': "In assisting grace, God through the Holy Spirit convicts, convinces, and impels the unsaved toward repentance and faith. God can exert powerful influences through the Holy Spirit to incline believers toward faith and obedience without literally forcing them to do so or changing their wills." I find assisting grace synonymous to a Wesleyan understanding of prevenient grace. But I refrain from assigning the later term to Vines' view in the spirit of his aversion to labels.

these passages support the view that man cannot save himself, but that in his depravity he does possess the God-given ability to receive or reject the gift of salvation.<sup>126</sup>

### **Foreknowledge**

Of the doctrine of foreknowledge, Vines explains that the passages in the New Testament that speak of it (i.e. Acts 2:23; Rom 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pet 1:1:2, 20) in relation to God simply convey the idea that God knows beforehand, in his omniscience, that which will happen in the future. God exists outside of the boundary of time. His knowledge is not hindered by the three dimensions of past, present, and future as are humans. This unbound knowledge of God means that He sees the events that transpire in all three dimensions in the eternal now. Yet, Vines does not hold a deterministic view that God acts upon this knowledge for the salvation of individuals. His view of the foreknowledge passages is that they describe God's purposes in salvation rather than His actions in regard to electing people for salvation itself. For instance, in Romans 8:29, Paul explains that God has predestined every child of God will become like His Son Jesus. Thus, in His omniscience, God knows beforehand of the sanctification of every true believer.<sup>127</sup>

When comparing his view of election and foreknowledge, once again, what becomes apparent is the theological tension Vines embraces. God chooses people to be saved (Eph 1:5, 11), as is already explained in his doctrine of election. Also, God knows what decisions people make beforehand, but bringing the two positions together so that God acts upon his foreknowledge to bring about salvation threatens human responsibility. It might potentially lead to the logical conclusions of hard determinism and double-predestination, and according to Vines, it has led to the hypercalvinist theological

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<sup>126</sup>Vines, "Baptist Battles: Calvinism."

<sup>127</sup>Ibid.

position that God elects babies to go to hell.<sup>128</sup>

According to Vines, Scripture does not support the notion that foreknowledge deals with God's electing people unto salvation. Furthermore, Vines argues that nowhere in the Bible can it be found that someone was or is predestined to go to hell. Knowledge, according to Vines, is based on facts. Foreknowledge, then, conveys that God has knowledge of the facts of the future. Yet, he concludes of foreknowledge that "God's knowledge of the future doesn't determine the future any more than our knowledge of the past determines the past."<sup>129</sup>

### **Eschatology**

Part of the theological underpinnings found in Vines' evangelism are his views on eschatology. The practical implications of this theological discipline link his eschatological views to his practice of evangelism. He explains,

Eschatology means the theology of the last things. Interest in such matters as heaven and hell, the resurrection of the believer and the second coming of Christ, has a definite place in any theology that takes seriously the revelation of Scripture. Eschatological study has very practical implications. [It] is vital in Southern Baptist theology. Southern Baptists take seriously the assignment of Jesus Christ to carry the message of salvation to the lost. Our message of Good News includes the element of hope for the despairing.<sup>130</sup>

Eschatology is a vital aspect of Vines' commitment to evangelism. A concern for the lost is easily perceived in his doctrinal understandings of heaven, hell, and the return of Christ. Vines preaching and writing treats these matters more comprehensively than is reflected in this brief section. Yet, I will highlight some of the particular connections Vines makes between eschatological and evangelistic concerns.

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<sup>128</sup>Ibid.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid. This quotation will be later critiqued in my evaluation.

<sup>130</sup>Jerry Vines, "Eschatology: Premillennial or Amillennial?" *The Theological Educator* 37 (1988): 134-35.

## Heaven

A key text from which Vines explains his doctrine of heaven is John 14:1-6. First, he concludes that heaven is an actual place that is being divinely prepared for all who enter into it. Second, it is the place where believers will eternally reside in the presence of God. Third, it is a desirable place of which Jesus uses the finite imagery of a mansion to give finite beings a context in which to meditate on its splendor. Fourth, entrance into heaven requires one to respond to an invitation. God has freely given the invitation (Rev 22:17) and its acceptance comes through conversion. As Vines preached about the doctrine of heaven, he would transition into a gospel plea. He proclaimed,

In Revelation, chapter 22, we see the invitation which God gives to you. In verse 17 it says, “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” There is your personal invitation to heaven. You can go to heaven because God Himself has invited you to go. It involves an invitation. This reservation also involves a conversion. Matthew 18, verse 3, Jesus says, “Except you be converted and become like a little child, you can in no way enter into heaven.” When Jesus was talking to Nicodemus in this chapter, the Lord Jesus said this to John. In John 3, verse 3, Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven.” He says in verse 5, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Jesus said unless you’re born again you can’t even see, much less, enter the kingdom of heaven. If you want to be heaven bound, you have to be heaven born. There has to be a conversion experience. There has to be that time in your life when you turn from your sins and by faith invite the Lord Jesus Christ into your heart and into your life.<sup>131</sup>

As this quote demonstrates, the promise of a believer’s eternal home in heaven is an important element of Vines’ theological underpinnings for evangelism.

## Hell

Along with preaching of the realness of heaven, Vines likewise believes in the reality of a literal hell. As he preached about that which is in the heart of a soul winner,

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<sup>131</sup>Jerry Vines, “I Want to See Heaven” [on-line]; sermon manuscript of a message delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 18 April 2004; Available from <http://sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

he asked,

Do you love people enough to tell them the truth? Do you really believe people outside of Jesus are lost? Do you really believe that people who die in their sins spend eternity in hell? That's what the Bible teaches. Jesus had the tenderest heart that ever beat in a human breast and yet he said more about hell than any other speaker in the Bible. There is really a hell. We do people a disservice when we are not truthful and tell them there is a hell to shun and a heaven to gain.<sup>132</sup>

The doctrine of hell spurs on believers to share the gospel, but this is not the only context in which Vines speaks of its reality. While speaking of the consequences of sin and pleading for a decision, he has passionately declared hell to be the eternal destination of all who are not found in Christ. He declared,

The Bible says, it is the road that leads to destruction—it's the Highway 7 to hell! A man dies in his sins, dies without choosing Jesus Christ as his Savior. There is the smoke of his torment that ascends forever and ever. There is the weeping and gnashing of teeth. The devil says, 'Welcome to hell, my child!' That's the road that leads to hell.<sup>133</sup>

### **The Return of Christ**

The doctrinal position that Vines holds to explain the second coming of Christ is dispensational premillennialism. He explains:

The premillennial position is that there will be a thousand year reign of Christ on the earth after His personal, visible return. He will return to earth before the millennium. The present age will be characterized by lawlessness and immorality. At the end of this age, Christ will return in the air for His church. There will be ushered in a seven-year period of tribulation upon the earth. After this the Lord will return to the earth with His saints to establish His kingdom for a thousand years.<sup>134</sup>

He offers the following reasons for his particular premillennial view. First, he believes that a "normal hermeneutic" leads to this position. This normal hermeneutic

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<sup>132</sup>Jerry Vines, "The Heart of a Soul-Winner" [on-line]; sermon manuscript of a message delivered 12 April 1987; accessed 21 October 2006; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>133</sup>Jerry Vines, "The Final Appeal" [on-line]; sermon manuscript; accessed 21 October 2006; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>134</sup>Vines, "Eschatology," 136-37.

asserts “that if the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, then seek no other sense.” Through utilizing a grammatico-historical method, he concludes that this normal hermeneutic is achieved, prophetic portions of Scripture are handled with accuracy, and allegorical abuses are minimized.<sup>135</sup>

His exegetical study of the Bible has led him to embrace premillennialism. The key text for the doctrine is Revelation 20, and Vines develops his position from a futuristic view on the interpretation of Revelation. He concludes that the two-fold use of the word “lived” in verses four and five acts as book ends of two resurrections for the millennium. The first of these resurrections is of the righteous dead, while the second is of the unrighteous dead. In 1 Corinthians 15:23-24 Paul uses adverbs of temporal sequence to intimate the same truth when he states, “But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end.” Moreover, Luke 14:14, 20:35, Philippians 3:11, and 1 Thessalonians 4:16 all imply this eschatological view of two resurrections. Isaiah also has several passages that support his view:

The millennium will fulfill literally the glowing expectation of the Old Testament prophets that there will be a kingdom of God on the earth. The curse on the earth will be lifted (Isaiah 11:6-8); the desert will blossom as a rose (Isaiah 35:1-2); the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord (Isaiah 11:9).<sup>136</sup>

Vines acknowledges that premillennialism does not answer all of the questions of the eschaton, but likewise, he asserts, “there are no biblical passages which the premillennial position cannot adequately explain.”<sup>137</sup>

Yet another reason for his embrace of premillennialism is that it satisfies his

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<sup>135</sup>Ibid., 137-138.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., 139-140.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., 139.

dispensational concerns. His theology is marked by a “balanced dispensationalism,” for he attempts to contrast God’s program for Israel with God’s present program for the church. He holds that there will be a literal fulfillment of God’s covenantal promises concerning the coming earthly kingdom.<sup>138</sup>

Vines’ eschatological preaching is laced with a plea for believers and nonbelievers. To believers, he explained, “A true desire to see Jesus brings changes in our lives.” Then, to nonbelievers, he asked, “And what is your response if you have never trusted this returning Savior? Only you can answer, but I urge you to heed the Bible’s warning: ‘Now is the day of salvation. Why will you die? Turn yourselves and live.’”<sup>139</sup>

### **An Evaluation of Vines’ Theological Framework of Evangelism**

Thus far, this chapter has described the theological framework for Vines’ evangelism. The subject will now shift toward its evaluation. I will begin by stating strengths of Vines’ theological underpinnings for evangelism, and will conclude this section with weaknesses.

#### **Strengths**

First, Vines is correct in making the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20) a foundational text for his Baptist theological method. As is attested to by Yarnell,

Baptists wish to understand and affirm Scripture in its entirety, and yet they too know that certain passages are central to Baptist hermeneutics. One foundational text for Baptists, especially for Southern Baptists, is found in Matthew 28:16-20, otherwise known as the ‘Great Commission.’<sup>140</sup>

The churches Vines pastored were exhorted to remain focused on the work of evangelism

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<sup>138</sup>Ibid., 140, 141.

<sup>139</sup>Jerry Vines, *I Shall Return* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1977), 21.

<sup>140</sup>Yarnell, “The Heart,” 2.

as he preached of the two central purposes of the church that he derived from this text. The “irresistible logic” captures the Hubmaierian declaration that a serious command demands serious obedience and fulfillment, and that failure to fulfill the Great Commission results in one being disorderly and disobedient to Christ.

Second, the theological framework of Vines’ evangelism evinces a carefully considered theology that remains well within the parameters of *The Baptist Faith and Message*. For example, his theological method affirms the statement found in article one, that the Bible has “salvation for its end.”<sup>141</sup> His doctrine of revelation demonstrates his conviction that “The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God’s revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction.”<sup>142</sup> His preaching on atonement supports the assertion that, “He [Jesus] honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin.”<sup>143</sup> The soteriology that set the course for his evangelism avowed, “In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.”<sup>144</sup> His eschatology anticipates the certainty that,

Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup>“The Baptist Faith and Message” [on-line]; accessed 3 December 2010; available from <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp>; Internet.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid.

These positions affirm my own that Vines' theology is indisputably Baptist, thus he deserves consideration as a model for any pastor who agrees with the theology espoused in *The Baptist Faith and Message* and desires to be an evangelistic pastor.

Third, Vines' pursuit of a biblical theology benefits both the pastor and the congregation God has given to his care. When Vines voices his concerns of Calvinism, it is the logical conclusions that hypercalvinists hold that cause him greatest concern.<sup>146</sup> When one's doctrine leads to positions such as double-predestination, declaring God to be the author of sin, and the possibility of an infant who dies without salvation, what results is a squelching of evangelistic fervor and division at the local church, associational, and denominational levels. The safeguard that prevents these theological missteps is a humble willingness on the part of the theologian to accept the intellectual tensions that are found within the Scriptures and not attempt to "systematize that which cannot be systematized."<sup>147</sup>

Moreover, he correctly explains that whenever one's logical conclusions lead a theologian to hold positions that cannot be clearly supported by Scripture, that theologian will likely embrace theological positions that threaten the doctrinal balance of the Bible. Vines reasons, "Any doctrine of the Bible taken to an extreme gets things out of balance. Scripture contains beautiful doctrinal balance. No doctrine of the Bible demolishes another doctrine in the Bible...They fit together."<sup>148</sup> The ultimate goal, then, of Vines' theology is not its systematization, but its precision. A precise theological method driven

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<sup>146</sup>Malcolm Yarnell offers an engaging discussion of hyper-Calvinism in Southern Baptist life. Malcolm Yarnell, "Calvinism: Cause for Rejoicing, Cause for Concern," in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Brad J. Waggoner (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Academic, 2008), 81-85.

<sup>147</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 17 August 2006.

<sup>148</sup> Vines, "Christianity 101."

by Scripture gives confidence to the pastor and members of his congregation that the doctrine from which he leads and feeds his flock is confined to the parameters of the Bible.

A fourth high mark of Vines' theological framework is its aversion to labels. Rather than being defined as a Calvinist or an Arminian, similar to the Anabaptists, he desires to be called a Biblicist. When an analysis of a particular theological position of his coincides with a Wesleyan or Reformed position, he jettisons himself from those kinds of analyses, for he wisely asserts, "I don't want to say I subscribe to any man-made view. To do so then opens me to being pegged a Wesleyan, or Arminian or whatever. That's one of my main views—we must strive to be Biblicists. Not Calvinists, Arminians, not any man-made labels."<sup>149</sup> He acknowledges that if he were to embrace any particular nuance of these labels it would lead to his being "tagged with everything that goes with a particular label."<sup>150</sup> These kinds of discussions only detract from his main mission of fulfilling the Great Commission; thus he seeks to rise above the labels.

### **Weaknesses**

An expositor should avoid aspects of Vines' theological framework. He admits that in his attempt to say only what the Scriptures say, he is not always successful.<sup>151</sup> Thus, I will speak to a few of these examples. First, his explanation of the prioritization of the importance of evangelism as being slightly above discipleship is justified more by his "irresistible logic" argument than his exegesis of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). There does not seem to be anything in his exposition of the Great

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<sup>149</sup>Jerry Vines, personal email correspondence by author, 7 October 2010.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid.

Commission's text that would lead him to this conclusion. This is not to say that Vines is guilty of pitting evangelism against discipleship or creating a false dichotomy against the two. One needs to look only at his consistent commitment to discipling his congregants through expository preaching to attest otherwise. Furthermore, I commend his desire to keep his church focused with an outward look. Yet, it does appear in this instance he ventures from an Anabaptist theological inheritance and depends less on what the Bible says, and more on his personal, logical view to derive this particular nuance of his theological framework for evangelism. An evangelistically focused pastor should always minister with a correct interpretation of the Great Commission in mind. He should intentionally do more than lead people to make decisions. The fruit of his evangelism is the making of fruit bearing disciples for the local church.<sup>152</sup>

Second, his view of foreknowledge draws upon a logical conclusion that I find difficult to support with Scripture. His explanation, that "God's knowledge of the future doesn't determine the future any more than our knowledge of the past determines the past," is a logical statement, though this statement seems to conflict and potentially undermine other biblical doctrines that create "a beautiful balance of Bible teaching in Scripture."<sup>153</sup> Even if one affirms his position that the foreknowledge passages in the New Testament speak of God's purpose of salvation rather than election unto salvation, this statement seems to question God's willingness to act upon His knowledge of the future to assure that a believer will, in the end, be conformed to the image of Jesus (Rom 8:29). Thus, it is more consistent for him to assert that God does have knowledge of the future. We are fully responsible to respond to God with repentance and obedience. We

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<sup>152</sup>Chuck Lawless, *Discipled Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches that are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 49. Lawless asserts that "making disciples" is the central aspect of fulfilling the Great Commission.

<sup>153</sup>Vines, "Christianity 101."

cannot fully understand the mysterious ways that God works within His sovereignty without removing our responsibility. Though these truths create an intellectual tension, they are meant to be understood and held together.

Third, as stated above, I commend Vines for his desire to be a biblicist. Since Scripture is the ultimate authority, and not a man-named systematic theological approach, every believer needs to demonstrate the same high regard for the biblical text. Yet, I firmly believe that there are theologians in the Reformed tradition of whom I am fully confident are likewise engaged in a pursuit for biblical theology. When their theological tradition counters their interpretation of the biblical text, they do, in all good integrity, honestly admit the times that Calvin, Zwingli, and even Spurgeon miss the mark. Thus, when any Reformed theologian demonstrates a text driven theological method, he should be regarded, based on Vines' definition, as a biblical theologian. The irenic spirit that I personally know touches every area of Vines' personality would garner greater attention from Reformed thinkers with acknowledgements like the one made by Paige Patterson in his critique of a Calvinistic view of total depravity:

A tragedy exists in the pulpits of most non-Calvinists. Far too many preachers apparently feel no mandate to preach sermons expounding the biblical text. Thankfully, many of our Calvinistic brethren are still proclaiming the Word of God instead of pop psychology.<sup>154</sup>

Vines, like many Calvinists, faithfully proclaims the Word of God. Calvinists would be more likely to look to him as a model for gospel proclamation and evangelistic fervor if they felt regarded by him as Biblicists in their own right. In the current Calvinist/Non-Calvinist debate found within the ranks of the Southern Baptist Convention, the need for mutual respect between the two coexisting parties cuts both

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<sup>154</sup>Paige Patterson, "Total Depravity," in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Academic, 2010), 30.

ways.<sup>155</sup> Along with this mutual acknowledgement would come an even larger audience to hear Vines' valid warning against the mistake of venturing into doctrinal positions defined by logical conclusions that cannot be supported by Scripture. Greater opportunity would exist to dialogue about the need to make the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20) a more integral part of everyone's theological method. As iron sharpens iron (Prov 27:17), each party could challenge one another when presuppositions and theological allegiances interfere with theology grounded in the interpretation of Scripture that relies upon authorial intent.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter concludes the biographical and theological review of Vines' ministry. My goal in these chapters is to establish him as a credible model whose life is marked by a consistent commitment to personal evangelism and orthodox, biblically centered theology. The content of this dissertation will now shift toward the particular contributions of his ministry that I find to be vintage Charles Jerry Vines. Both of these contributions focus on his preaching. The first area of consideration focuses upon the particular mechanics of his preaching that factor into his evangelistic effectiveness. The second area considers matters of its content that led the churches he pastored to persist in their evangelistic commitment.

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<sup>155</sup>Ed Stetzer's research on the growth of Calvinism in young pastors of the Southern Baptist Convention offers the most trustworthy treatment of the rise of the Reformed movement in contemporary SBC life. Ed Stetzer, "Calvinism, Evangelism, and SBC Leadership," in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Brad J. Waggoner (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Academic, 2008), 13-26.

CHAPTER 4  
CALLING OUT THE LOST: A SURVEY OF  
VINES' EVANGELISTIC TWIST WITHIN  
HIS EXPOSITORY PREACHING

**Introduction**

As the result of more than fifty years of preaching, Charles Jerry Vines has the reputation of being both an expositor and an evangelistic preacher.<sup>1</sup> He views these two elements of his preaching as inseparable and explains their relationship in *Power in the Pulpit*: “All Bible preaching issues forth into evangelism. Regardless of the Bible content of your message, the subject should include an evangelistic appeal.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hayes Wicker, O. S. Hawkins, and Nelson Sturgill, “Church Members, SBC Leaders Reflect on Vines’ Ministry,” *Florida Baptist Witness*, 16 February 2006 [online]; accessed 19 October 2006; available from <http://www.floridabaptistwitness.com/5505.article>; Internet. On the occasion of Vines’ retirement as pastor of The First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, Wicker, pastor of The First Baptist Church, Naples, FL commented, “Jerry Vines, in my opinion, is the premier expository preacher in the Southern Baptist Convention and perhaps the nation.” Hawkins, president of Guidestone Resources and a notable expositor in his own right, said, “He has been a model for me for many years in expository preaching.” These comments, spoken by two of the leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention, tell of Vines’ faithfulness as he weekly set his mind to the task of expository preaching. Perhaps it is Nelson Sturgill, a former chairman of the deacons of First Baptist, who offers the most significant commendation of his preaching. He asserts: “Dr. Vines has had a great impact on our family. We feel very fortunate to have been under his leadership and ministry for the last twenty-three years. We could always be sure if we brought a visitor, they would hear the plan of salvation and have an opportunity to accept Christ.”

<sup>2</sup>Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermon* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 218. I credit Vines with this statement since Shaddix edited the content of *Power* from Jerry Vines, *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), and Jerry Vines, *A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986). This particular statement represents the quality of Shaddix’s work. The statement in Vines’ writing from which

The particular way he turns his sermons toward an evangelistic appeal is through what he calls “the evangelistic twist.” He places it at the end of his sermon, and defines it as turning a message “toward an appeal to the unsaved in the audience to receive Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior.”<sup>3</sup>

This chapter gives an analysis of Vines’ evangelistic twist within his expository preaching. I will first discuss his expository method and how it functions. This section possesses many of the unique features and contributions of Vines’ approach to the field of expository preaching, one of which being the evangelistic twist. Next I will identify different kinds of twists and survey his use of them in his Old and New Testament preaching. The survey ascribes to the twist’s value and the expanse of its use through citing examples from a variety of biblical genres and books. I conclude with a listing of principles that an expositor can incorporate into his use of the twist, along with pitfalls he must avoid. The concepts found within his homiletics are reproducible. They are backed by fifty years of evangelistic fruitfulness in the pastoral context, thus making Vines’ pastoral preaching a model of evangelistic focus.

### **Expository Method**

Vines’ greatest contribution to the field of expository preaching is his advocacy and method of preaching through entire books of the Bible. He asserts, “The best preaching you can do is to go through books of the Bible—chapter by chapter and

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Shaddix likely drew this statement is in Vines, *A Practical Guide*, 146-47, where Vines states: “Bible preaching always points to evangelism. Bible Preaching that does not ultimately call for the unsaved to receive Jesus Christ as personal Savior borders on heresy. Regardless of the Bible content of your message, the subject can be turned toward an evangelistic appeal.” This unnecessary use of the charge of heresy is a matter that will be revisited in my conclusions in chapter 6.

<sup>3</sup>Vines, *A Practical Guide*, 146.

paragraph by paragraph—in a systematic fashion.”<sup>4</sup> He defines an expository sermon as a sermon “that expounds a passage of Scripture, organizes it around a central theme and main points, and then decisively applies its message to the listeners.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, he calls his approach “the expository sermonizing method,” which he contends,

This method reflects understanding of the passage on the part of the preacher. He prepares a logical presentation of the content of the message. He has a main topic, main divisions, an introduction, and a conclusion. Using this structure he will by means of illustration, argumentation, and explanation make the passage clear to the people and apply its truths to their lives.<sup>6</sup>

The two main aspects of a preacher’s sermon preparation are his exegetical study of a text and the development of his sermon’s structure. The last aspect of the sermon’s structure is the invitation, which includes the evangelistic twist.

### **Exegetical Preparation**

Vines’ method begins with the selection of a book of the Bible from which to preach. This step should not be rushed, for there are three considerations that Vines offers for a book’s selection. First, one must make the selection carefully. Practically speaking, a pastor should not choose a difficult book to preach in his first attempts at exposition. The difficulty of preaching through books such as Romans, Revelation, or Zechariah might cause the preacher to grow discouraged.<sup>7</sup> Even seasoned preachers must be cautious in their selection. For instance, after years of faithful exposition, before preaching through the book of Job, Vines admits, “It took me a year and a half of personal study before I felt I was ready to present in my sermons Job’s message for our

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>7</sup>Vines, *A Practical Guide*, 61-62.

day.”<sup>8</sup> Though this advice might sound pragmatic, it is legitimate to affirm that the Spirit leads someone to adequately study a book he finds difficult before preaching through it.

Second, he must also choose a book according to the need of the people. Haddon Robinson explains: “While all Scripture is profitable, not every Scripture possesses equal profit for a congregation at a particular time.”<sup>9</sup> The expositor discovers the books that are most profitable for his listeners by matching their deepest spiritual needs with books that address them. Third, when an authentic prayer life is included in his exposition, he will select the book prayerfully.<sup>10</sup> God will faithfully guide the preacher to the correct book as he petitions the Lord in prayer.

Vines’ next step in the process is to read the selected book several times and divide it into preachable units. Vines’ wood chopping metaphor, another contribution to the field of expository preaching, helps him to correctly determine these preachable units. An expositor is much like a log chopper. When a log is placed before the chopper, he will study the grain and knots of the wood to find the places it will most naturally split. After chopping along these natural splits, the chopped wood can be restudied, the natural splits can again be determined, and the log can be split further. This process continues until the wood is chopped down to its desirable size. So it is with a book of the Bible. The biblical author wrote the book with natural divisions. The expositor must engage in exegetical study and locate these divisions, and while considering his time restraints, he splits the log of a biblical book down to its desirable preachable units.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Jerry Vines, *Immortal Combat: A Study of the Book of Job* (n.p., 2007), i.

<sup>9</sup>Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 54.

<sup>10</sup>Vines, *A Practical Guide*, 62.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 66.

After Vines discovers these units, he is then ready to enter into the next stages of his textual study. Through “investigation,” Vines seeks the answer to the question, “What does the text say?”<sup>12</sup> It is the stage called “interpretation” that he strives to answer, “What does the text mean?”<sup>13</sup> His goal is to consult background studies, conduct literary genre studies, examine the original languages, and consult critical, homiletical, and devotional commentaries in his quest for accurate interpretation. After considering to whom the message will be delivered, he then formulates the Central Idea of the Text (CIT).<sup>14</sup> The CIT is a one-sentence statement of fifteen to eighteen words written in the past tense that summarizes the central idea of the preachable unit.<sup>15</sup>

The CIT then becomes the basis of what Vines and Shaddix identify as the sermon’s proposition. An acceptable proposition is comprised of “a 15-18 word present or future tense application of the CIT to the contemporary context.”<sup>16</sup> The call for the proposition to be written in the present or future tense reminds the preacher to guide his audience from the biblical world into the modern world.<sup>17</sup> The definition’s use of the word “application” reminds the expositor that he is no longer searching the text’s meaning. Rather, he is now applying its timeless truths to a contemporary audience. The

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 68-76.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 76-94.

<sup>14</sup>Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 129. The authors borrow the term, “Central Idea of the Text” (CIT) from Al Fasol, *Essentials of Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 56.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 134.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., This discussion of moving an audience from the biblical world to the ancient world is the topic of John Stott’s classic volume on preaching, John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

proposition should be promising, general, simple, clear, comprehensive, important, and sermonic. Its function is to define the sermon's purpose.<sup>18</sup>

### **Sermon Structure**

With every text that Vines preaches, he makes it his goal to correctly analyze it so that he can arrive at its meaning and implications. He seeks to discover how to apply the text's meaning and implications to the needs of his particular audience. At this point, he is ready to move from exegesis to the sermon structure portion of his preparation. He is equipped with his proposition, and around it will he now develop his homiletical outline.

**Main topic.** The main topic of the message is the sermon's proposition as it is described above. It is the first element of the sermon's structure to arise out of Vine's exegesis. It links his expected audience with the exegetical work of his study and serves as the foundation for the message. It should unify the entire sermon and allow for clear application of the passage to the lives of one's listeners. It is to be stated toward the beginning of a message and should summarize "the whole thought of the Scripture passage being preached."<sup>19</sup>

**Main divisions.** The second element of a sermon's structure to which Vines' exegesis must lead are the sermon's main divisions.<sup>20</sup> These main points must be drawn

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 178-79.

<sup>19</sup>Vines, *A Practical Guide*, 105.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 111-16, Vines asserts this outline of main divisions should consist of the following: (1) the main points should have a parallel structure; (2) the main points should be mutually exclusive; (3) the main points should be stated in complete sentences; (4) the main points should have a gradual heightening; (5) the main points should move toward a climax; (6) the main points should be statements, not questions.

from the passage and unified by the main topic.<sup>21</sup> To insure that this fusion occurs, Vines advises the preacher to develop a good outline, for “a good outline will enhance the ability of the preacher to communicate the central theme.”<sup>22</sup> After developing an outline with the message’s main divisions, the task of the preacher is then to put “meat on the bones” of his message by developing three main ingredients for each main point— explanation, application, and illustration.<sup>23</sup> To provide coherency among the main divisions, transition statements should be developed that demonstrate a logical progression of the sermon.<sup>24</sup>

Clear explanation is an essential component to the development of a main division. Vines explains: “Preaching has its roots in the clear explanation of God’s revelation.” Thus, the goal of expository preaching is the proper explanation of the text. Though this goal may be true, there is a distinction that Vines draws between simple explanation and a sermon’s explanation of a particular aspect of the text, for the sermon should result in vaulting “the supernatural Word into the mind of the listener, thus enabling life change.” Rather than focus on the obvious or unimportant aspects of a passage, he advises that life change will happen as the preacher strives to explain the unclear elements of the passage. The remaining aspects of the development of a sermon’s main divisions are subservient to the tool of explanation, for “the rest hinge on a proper understanding of truth.”<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, Vines urges the preacher to use illustrations. He writes,

There are many purposes of sermon illustrations. The people can remember the truth you are communicating much better by means of a simple, to-the-point

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 123-24.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 176-77.

illustration. Good illustrations stir the emotions and move people to action. By means of an illustration you can create an awareness of need in your listeners. They are very helpful in building bridges to your listeners.<sup>26</sup>

Illustrations clarify truth, aid a listener to understand what the preacher is communicating, and can positively affect the audience's emotions. He asserts that as long as an illustration is well placed, illustrates the point of the main division, and is appropriate for the audience, it will prove helpful.<sup>27</sup>

Another aspect of a well developed main division is argumentation. Vines defines argumentation in preaching as "persuasion with the intent of changing an attitude or action."<sup>28</sup> By answering the question, "What assertion(s) won't my audience immediately agree with?" the preacher strives to anticipate the possible objections of the audience to the truth he proclaims and respond to these objections with reason and discussion. Vines notes that this tool calls for a keen sense of discernment on the part of the preacher. He must know his audience to present the arguments they are likely to mention as they interact and respond to the sermon.<sup>29</sup> It is particularly helpful to utilize argumentation when making the turn toward the evangelistic twist.

Explanation, illustration, and argumentation culminate into the application of God's Word to the life of the preacher's listeners. Proper application happens when the preacher accomplishes the arduous task of "linking the importance of the truth of the text with the hearers' situation and need."<sup>30</sup> The preacher must show his listeners how to live out particular Biblical truths. Vines declares this to be the final aspect of expounding the meaning of the text, for the preacher asks himself, "So what? What does this have to say

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<sup>26</sup>Vines, *A Practical Guide*, 131.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 132-33

<sup>28</sup>Vines, *Power*, 178

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 178-79.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 181.

to my people?” The answer to these two questions, when derived from the proper understanding of the text, leads to text driven application.<sup>31</sup>

**Introduction and Striking Summation.** Third, the sermon’s structure should include an introduction. Vines places the introduction after the main idea and main divisions because he believes it best to develop the introduction toward the end of one’s message preparation. He reasons, “I have always had a rather difficult time introducing something before I know what I want to introduce.” He suggests that the three-fold purpose of an introduction is to arouse the listeners’ interest, prepare them for what is to come, and move the preacher into the body of the message quickly. The marks of a good introduction are that it will be short, its form will vary from week to week, and it will address the needs of the hearers.<sup>32</sup>

The fourth part of a sermon’s structure is its conclusion. Vines holds John Broadus’ view, that after the introduction, the second most important part of a sermon is the conclusion. He observes in other examples of preaching that despite the conclusion’s importance, it is regrettably the most neglected part of a preacher’s preparation. To overcome this shortcoming, he advises that a conclusion should reflect the sermon’s main divisions, fit with the sermon’s content, and be characterized by clarity of thought. Furthermore, he states that brevity, energy, the element of surprise, and a sense of timing are always needed aspects of a strong conclusion. It should call for a response from

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 181-84. Also helpful in Vines’ treatment of application are the attributes he believes mark strong application in preaching. He claims it should be personal, varied, decisive, and appealing.

<sup>32</sup>Vines, *A Practical Guide*, 137-40.

audience.<sup>33</sup> Most importantly, it should not be called a conclusion. Its better term, according to Vines and Shaddix, is a “striking summation.”<sup>34</sup>

The term “striking summation” is yet another contribution of Vines and Shaddix to the field of expository preaching. Rather than a conclusion, the striking summation is intended to reinforce the proposition and review its relevancy. It should fit the exposition, be characterized by clarity of thought, be energetically delivered, and be relevant to the audience. Their reason for not using the term “conclusion” to describe this section of the message is: “A sermon is not concluded until it is lived out in the lives of the people who hear it.”<sup>35</sup>

**Evangelistic appeal.** The final part of the sermon Vines prepares is the invitation. He finds it unfortunate that very little is written on giving invitations, for he stresses: “The invitation is the key part of the sermon.” He writes,

We do not preach simply to convey information. We want something to happen in the hearts of those who hear our sermons. We are lawyers pleading our Lord’s cause. We are calling for a verdict...Any expository sermon lends itself to this method.<sup>36</sup>

Until an evangelistic appeal is given, Vines does not believe the sermon has been fully preached. He views every message as an opportunity to proclaim the gospel to the lost and appeal for their response, but in a more general sense, it is a preacher’s call for action. It is not limited to a traditional altar call. It simply calls listeners to commit themselves to the truths to which they just listened.

The following points are offered by Vines and Shaddix as rationale for an invitation:

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 142-45.

<sup>34</sup>Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 207.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Vines, *A Practical Guide*, 146.

1. Though the form of a public “aisle walking” invitation is not found in the Bible, its function most certainly is.
2. The Bible possesses many examples of calls to respond to God.
3. Secular and spiritual analysts alike have testified to the validity and the value of giving persons an opportunity to act immediately upon significant decisions.
4. Both psychological and spiritual value are attached to making some physical expression that will serve as a reminder of a significant commitment in days to come (ex. Abraham built an altar in Genesis 12-13, Israelites built a monument to remind them of their covenant with God in Joshua 4).
5. Biblical and historical development of the public invitation reveals it to be a nonnegotiable part of the nature of preaching.
6. Proclamation of God’s truth implies the call for decision. The Gospel demands a response from those who are confronted with its claims.<sup>37</sup>

Models for the invitation range from verbal appeal, physical relocation, post-meeting ministry, written record on a decision card, physical gesture, to the multiple approach of incorporating one or more of these models in the same evangelistic plea. Whatever the model the preacher employs, the qualities Vines’ recognizes of an acceptable invitation are as follows:

1. It must be cohesive with the proceeding sermon.
2. An invitation for salvation may not best serve a sermon following a call for Christians to act upon the subject of a message.
3. It must be simple and clear. Your listeners must understand exactly what they are being exhorted to do.
4. It should avoid equating walking down the aisle with a commitment to Christ.
5. Make sure that the expression you invite your audience to do is functional.
6. It must be characterized by some decisive element and give responders the chance to act upon their decision.
7. Resist the argument that people need time to carefully consider the commitment they are being asked to act upon. People do not need time to think about repenting. They need to repent.

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<sup>37</sup>Vines, *Power in the Pulpit*, 208.

8. Resist the argument that persons must be asked to respond only when they are spiritually prepared to do so. How is this discernable? Invite people to respond with integrity and without manipulation.
9. Be nonmanipulative and nonthreatening in your demeanor.
10. Avoid the “bait and switch” technique (someone is asked to respond, they do, then you ask them to respond to a second and third response).
11. Make the invitation personal to every listener.
12. Every invitation should involve an evangelistic twist. Always turn the message to an appeal to the unsaved.<sup>38</sup>

Vines’ approach to expository preaching through books of the Bible is demanding. He compares it to mining for a beautiful diamond.<sup>39</sup> When a preacher is willing to commit himself to the hard work of digging for it, cutting it carefully, and polishing it to a brilliant shine, the fulfillment and reward of the work are immense. The next part of this chapter moves from explaining Vines’ approach to expository preaching with an evangelistic twist to a study of its practice. It will survey his use of the evangelistic twist as he used it in his expository preaching through books of the Bible.

### **Survey of the Evangelistic Twist**

The concept of “the evangelistic twist” is an essential component of Vines’ expository method. He developed it during his years of preaching and throughout his ministry, and he has sought to apply it to nearly every sermon.<sup>40</sup> It is mentioned in his first book on sermon preparation, *A Practical Guide*, and reaffirmed in *Power* that was printed thirteen years later. Yet, beyond its mention and brief description, he has not written an extensive treatment of it.

Underlying its use is the same irresistible logic that Vines finds expressed in the main purposes of the church, evangelism, and the entirety of the Bible. He reasons, as

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 216-18.

<sup>39</sup> Jerry Vines, “The Richness of Expository Preaching” (1976), audiocassette.

<sup>40</sup> Jerry Vines, email correspondence by author, 24 October 2008.

noted earlier,

I believe most of the Bible is written for believers. However, underlying all of Scripture and all expository preaching is a firm conviction I have about the rationale for evangelism: If there is a heaven, and there is; if there is a hell, and there is; then, our greatest assignment is to tell people about Jesus, who died on the cross so people might not have to go to hell and can go to heaven.<sup>41</sup>

Every sermon gives Vines the opportunity to fulfill the evangelistic task that he determines to be a Christian's greatest assignment. The evangelistic twist is a rhetorical tool he wields to faithfully fulfill this assignment. He uses it to transition his sermon from its biblical subject to its gospel invitation. It gives emphasis to the primary thrust of the passage as it twists the message toward evangelism. The remainder of the section examines this tool in his preaching from a variety of biblical books and genres. It classifies its usage to demonstrate how expositors, while remaining faithful to the text, can vary its usage in reproducible and sundry ways.

### **An Eternity Twist**

In his exposition of the Genesis 1:3-31 account of creation, Vines presents his case that God created the world in a literal seven day, twenty-four hour a day week. He explains the details of the text and challenges his listeners that if they believe "in the beginning God," was powerful enough to create the world, they should also believe that God can perform His creative work in six days and rest on the seventh if He chooses. He then continues by exposing the fallacy of evolution. He rebuts theistic evolution and grounds Nietzsche's nihilism, Marxism, and Communism as social expressions of Darwinian thought. He discusses evolution's rejection of morality and explains that the more persons are told they are nothing more than animals, the more like animals they act. Then comes the twist:

If I didn't know the Lord Jesus as my personal Savior, if I had not met God in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, that verse right there would be one of

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

the most frightening verses I had ever read in the Bible. The Bible says: It is appointed unto man once to die. You are going to die. When you are young, you think very little about death. When you get a little older you think a little bit more about death and the older you get the more and more you think about death. Someone said death is the subject which a man spends a lifetime trying not to think about. You are going to die. It is appointed unto man once to die. Your body will return to the earth from whence it was. That will not be the end of you. What does the evolutionist do with that? The evolutionist has no explanation for the existence the origin of life, nor does he have any explanation for those characteristics which are beyond the realm of the physical. What does the evolutionist do with the fact that down in your heart tonight you know when you die you will still be somewhere in eternity and you have to come face to face with God. God is unavoidable.<sup>42</sup>

Within the excerpt above lies an eternity twist. The prospect of death, the judgment of God, and eternal consequence of sin are placed before his listeners. They are brought to a decision, and only the imputed righteousness of Christ will spare the sinner from the consequences of his sin.

### **A Theological Twist**

“Bringing an Offering” is the title of Vines’ overview exposition of Leviticus 1-7. From its beginning, Vines pleads with his audience regarding the importance of their study of the book of Leviticus. At first blush, the book appears complicated and foreign to contemporary readers. The Levitical law found within the book is no longer needed, for it has been fulfilled in Christ. Yet, the theme of the Bible is salvation. Scripture tells the story of how sinners deserving hell can go to heaven and enter into fellowship with God forever. Leviticus is a part of that story.

Moreover, it is a book that teaches its readers about worship. Its theme is how a sinner can approach a holy God. The key to the book is Leviticus 1:2, for it teaches that man is required to bring offerings before the Lord. Vines continues by classifying the different kinds of offerings discussed within the specified chapters, climaxing in verse seven with his explanation of the sin offering. He asserts that everyone is in need of

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<sup>42</sup>Jerry Vines, “A World in a Week” [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Genesis 1:3-31 delivered at First Baptist church, Jacksonville, FL; accessed 27 March 2008; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

presenting a sin offering since all of humanity is guilty of committing sin. Yet, the twist directs guilty sinners to a Savior:

Chapter 5, verse 1. Here's the fifth offering, the second of the satisfaction offerings. It's the trespass offering. You will find that mentioned specifically in verse 6. "He shall bring his trespass offering." In chapter 5 you have a series of illustrations of particular sins committed. In verse 1 it talks about swearing. In verse 2 it talks about unclean things. In verse 19, "He hath trespassed against the Lord in holy things." That means he is giving a series of illustrations. He doesn't name every sin you can commit. But he's just talking about acts of sin. There was a trespass offering for those individual acts of sin. When a man had committed a particular sin, he would offer a trespass offering. Look at verse 6. "And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the Lord for his sin which he has sinned." An act of sin! The last part of the verse says, "And the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin." When Jesus died on the cross, He not only dealt with the principle of sin, but also the practice of sin. Not only did He deal with the nature of sin, but also the behavior of sin. Not only did He deal with the root of sin, but also the fruits of sin. That's what Jesus did for us on the cross. He died on the cross to give us a brand-new nature, and He gave us the power so that we can live a godly consecrated whole, totally committed life to the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>43</sup>

This is an example of a theological twist. In this particular case, Vines explains how Christ's sacrifice is the propitiation for sin. His doctrinal explanation turned the message toward the gospel. Vines asked if his audience had ever brought their offering to God. He contended that offerings of works or a well lived life do not suffice. He then pleaded with his listeners to claim Christ's atoning work for their salvation.

### **A Hope Twist**

Vines entitled his sermon on Judges 2, "Regeneration or Degeneration." The title anticipates the message's movement from Judges 2 to salvation found in Christ. In it, he discusses the moral and spiritual declension of Israel as God's people were influenced by the surrounding Canaanite culture. He draws many comparisons of Israel's compromise to that of contemporary America. The pleas of the message are to never forget all that God has done on our behalf, children are to embrace the inheritance of faith

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<sup>43</sup>Jerry Vines, "Bringing An Offering" [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Leviticus 1-7 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL on 14 January 2004; accessed 19 March 2010; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

from previous generations, and we are to break the sin cycle marked by rebellion, retribution, repentance, and restoration. He explains that God left the Canaanites in the land in order to test Israel's obedience (Judges 2:21-23). Then, Vines poses a question that sets up the twist:

Do you think maybe all the pain and misery we are experiencing in America is God's megaphone to arouse a deaf nation? Is there any hope? Oh, yes. Look at verse 16 – “Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges.” Nevertheless, that's the word of hope. For the next 14 chapters God is going to raise up judges. The word, judge, there means to save or to deliver. For 14 chapters God is going to be saying that there's a Savior, there's a Savior, there's a Savior. When the Lord Jesus Christ was born the Bible says in Matthew 1:21, “and thou shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.” It doesn't have to be degeneration, we have a Savior, you can experience regeneration. Have you ever been saved?<sup>44</sup>

This particular example is best classified as a hope twist. America, like Israel, seems hopeless to repent due to its present deafness toward God. Despite Israel's declension, God continued to appoint leaders who served as a type of savior to deliver His people. Jesus is the righteous Savior, in whom one's degeneration can be redeemed through the Holy Spirit's saving work of regeneration.

### **A Forgiveness Twist**

“In the Hiding Place” is an exposition of the Davidic Psalm 32. Vines explains that David wrote the Psalm after his sin with Bathsheba was exposed (2 Samuel 11, 12). As David repented of his sins, he was inspired to write this Psalm along with Psalm 51. Psalm 32 uses the words “sin,” “iniquity,” and “transgressions,” to describe sin. Vines borrows Spurgeon's description of them as being the three-headed dog at the gates of hell, and asserts that David felt the effects of his sin both physically and spiritually. There are three words that David uses to describe what “God can do with this sin.” These words are “covered,” “forgiven,” and “imputed not.”

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<sup>44</sup>Jerry Vines, “Degeneration or Regeneration” [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Judges 2 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 26 April 1995; accessed 20 October 2010; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

Again, Vines cites Spurgeon and calls these words the trinity of heaven that conquers the trinity of hell. Every Christian is entreated to follow David in facing up to his or her sin. Rather than follow David's example of hiding from God for a year, believers should run to God in times of temptation as "a hiding place" (Psalm 32:7).

These truths segued into the twist:

This psalm is no encouragement for Christians who sin. David tells of the terrible toll it has taken upon him. But this Psalm is given to us to show us that even when we have sinned, if we will confess God will forgive us and cleanse us from our sins. Do you need a Savior? I'm glad you came because I have a Savior to offer you. His name is Jesus. Wouldn't you like to receive Jesus?<sup>45</sup>

I classify this example as a forgiveness twist. The forgiveness of which David sings is only available to believers. Yet, when a person trusts Christ as Savior, the trinity of heaven conquers the trinity of hell and a lost person rests in God's forgiveness.

### **A Comparison Twist**

Vines wastes little time in his exposition of Ecclesiastes to unveil his evangelistic application of the book. In his introduction, he describes the book as both a philosophical and evangelistic book. It is a book written for people without a relationship with Christ. Christians understand Jesus is the answer to the deepest needs of the human heart, yet others seek satisfaction in the creation rather than the Creator. Solomon tried everything the world offered, but declared it all vanity (Eccle 1:2). Neither education nor degradation fulfilled him, and Vines leads the lost members of his audience to reach the same conclusion. Then, after expounding upon the temporality of all the world offers, he places the following twist:

Paul wrote a one verse commentary to the book of Ecclesiastes. At least I take it that way. In the book of Philippians, the joy book, Paul wrote a verse of scripture

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<sup>45</sup>Jerry Vines, "In the Hiding Place" [on-line]; sermon manuscript of an exposition of Psalm 32 delivered at the First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida 6 March 1998; accessed 20 October 2010; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

that is rather interesting. In Philippians chapter 3, verse 8, near the end of the verse Paul says, ‘For whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung (the Greek word is *skubalon*), that I may win Christ.’ Paul looked at all the alternatives. Everything under the sun that this old world has to offer, all of this world’s riches, that he says is *skubalon*, dung. All of this world’s fame he said *skubalon*, dung. All of the enticements and allurements that the world under the sun could offer a person I counted it all *skubalon*, dung, that I might win Christ. When you get to the end, all that's going to matter is this. Do you have Christ as your Savior?<sup>46</sup>

I classify this twist as a comparative twist, for when one compares the satisfaction found in Christ with the dissatisfaction of life without Him, he is forced to face up to life’s vanity. This comparison leads to the invitation to become a Christian.

### **A Completeness Twist**

Vines’ message from Ezekiel 9-11 focuses on the glory of God. He avers God’s glory to be a major theme of the Bible, for he has found the word “glory” over four hundred times throughout the Old and New Testaments. He defines it as “the worthy weight of God in all of its splendor when God chooses to reveal himself to his people.”<sup>47</sup> Israel is punished by God in these verses because of their sin. The glory of God lingered to give Israel the opportunity to repent, but they continued in their sin; therefore the glory left them. Vines beckons his listeners to turn to Ezekiel 43:4 and then presents God’s promise of the return of His glory. He explains how the glory of God in the world today will be manifested in authentic revival. Then after calling for both corporate and personal revival in his application, he turns the message to the gospel:

Look at chapter 11 and I want to close with this. God promises in verse 19, I will give them one heart and I will put a new spirit within you. I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh. That is an Old Testament

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<sup>46</sup>Jerry Vines, “The Search for Satisfaction” [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Ecclesiastes 12:1-3; 6-8 delivered at the First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida on 20 June 2004; accessed 20 October 2010; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>47</sup>Jerry Vines, “When the Glory Goes” [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Ezekiel 9-11 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida 22 May 2002; accessed 20 October 2010; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

equivalent of what Jesus was talking about in John 3 when he said ye must be born again. Do you know how to have the glory of God in your life? Repent of your sins and by faith receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior and when you do that the Bible says you are born again. God gives you a brand new heart.<sup>48</sup>

I categorize this example as a completeness twist. If a person is not born again, his heart of stone prevents him from ever experiencing the glory of God. The person's life will remain void of God's glory unless he repents and trusts Christ as personal Savior. Then, he will be complete.

### **A Triage Twist**

Vines' exposition of Matthew 23:23 focuses on the subject of tithing. In this verse, Jesus confronts the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy. Though they tithe, they neglect the more important matters of justice, mercy, and faith. Jesus says of these matters: "These ought to have done, but don't leave the other undone; do that also." He's talking about the matter of the tithe." He continues to give a theology of stewardship, anchoring his message on the ten percent requirement of the tithe. As he concluded his message, he stated:

You might say, "Preacher, this message hasn't really been for me today, by your own statements, because I have never received the Lord Jesus as personal Savior. What about me? Is there anything in this service for me?" Yes, here's what it is. God is not asking you to give 10% of your money. In fact, God's not asking you to give any of your money. That's not what He wants out of you. God wants YOU. He wants you to give yourself to Him.<sup>49</sup>

Within the context of the discipline of giving, Vines demonstrates a triage twist. God is more concerned with a person's salvation than his faithful stewardship. Much like a surgeon who prioritizes the neediest patients in a hospital's emergency room and treats them in order of importance, Vines' appeal to the lost person has more to do

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Jerry Vines, "Just Do It" [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Matthew 23:23 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida 17 September 2000; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

with his justification than his obedience to an imperative of discipleship.<sup>50</sup>

### **A Relational Twist**

An example of a relational twist is found at the end of Vines' sermon on Acts 17:15-25. The passage records Paul's ministry in Athens when he went there to preach the gospel. He was taken to the Areopagus and encountered an altar on which was the inscription, "To an unknown God" (23). This phrase became the subject of Paul's evangelistic plea. He made known to the Greeks the God who they worshiped in ignorance. Though most of his audience ridiculed him, some requested to hear him again while others believed. Building on the same theme as Paul's message, Vines turned the message to the needs of his listeners,

Some responded by jeering. Some responded by delaying. But thank God, some responded by believing. They received the message into their hearts and when they received the message of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ into their hearts, you know what happened to them? They came to know the God who can be known. I'm going to give you the opportunity of a lifetime. I'm going to give you the opportunity to do something today like nothing else you will ever do in all of your life. I'm going to give you the opportunity to come to know God in a personal way.<sup>51</sup>

The appeal is simple: A relationship with God is nonexistent until it begins by trusting Christ as Savior.

### **An Assurance Twist**

"The Unimpeachable Witness" is the title for Vines' exposition of 1 John 5:6-

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<sup>50</sup> This example of a twist is synonymous with the only example found in Vines' writings. In Vines, *A Practical Guide*, 147, he suggests, "If you are preaching on tithing, for instance, you can say something like this: 'Perhaps there are many of you in the service who do not know Jesus as your personal Savior. What has tithing to do with you? Actually, it has nothing. Tithing is a spiritual matter between the believer and his Lord. If you do not know Jesus as your Savior, He doesn't want your money. He wants you! I'm going to ask you today to give your heart and life to Him.'"

<sup>51</sup> Jerry Vines, "Powerbook: The God You Can Know" [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Acts 17:15-25 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 10 December 2000; accessed 21 October 2010; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

13. A believer's assurance of salvation is a major theme of the letter of 1 John, and Vines captures that theme in his evangelistic twist of the message. He explains the subject of the sermon to be how a person can know they are going to heaven when they die.

Furthermore, he addresses how a person can know that he or she is really saved.

Assurance comes to a believer thanks to the witness of the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:6). This evidence is given to Christians, so they can know with certainty they are saved and going to heaven when they die.<sup>52</sup> Vines then transitions into a twist:

There's only one record on this earth that will truly prove that you have been born again and you are going to heaven when you die and that's the record God has given in His Word. Do you have a promise you're holding on to? "Whosoever shall believe in his heart that God hath raised Him from the dead shall be saved." Are you holding on to that promise? What about this one? "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." I was talking to a guy in middle Georgia a number of years ago. He was having problems with this business of knowing he was really saved. The Lord led me to that promise in John 6. He couldn't seem to really grasp that he was truly saved and that he could have assurance. I read in that verse – "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." I said to him - son, have you come to Jesus? He said, Preacher, as best I know I have come to Jesus. I said son, if you have come to Jesus, what did He say? "I will in no wise cast out." If Jesus said if you will come to Him he wouldn't cast you out, then are you in or out? He saw it! He said, "I'm in." I said, "Son, if you are in, that's all you have to worry about. Just thank God for it and move on." And he laid hold of that promise. Have you come to Christ? Have you accepted Him as your Savior? Then you're in. You're not out. You're His!<sup>53</sup>

This example illustrates how Vines can turn the subject of the assurance of a believer into a plea for nonbelievers to come to Christ.

### **A Prophetic Twist**

In his exposition of Revelation 12, Vines interprets the passage from a classical pre-tribulation, premillennial position. The woman is symbolic of Israel (12:1). The red

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<sup>52</sup>Jerry Vines, "The Unimpeachable Witness" [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of 1 John 5:6-13 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 8 June 1997; accessed 21 October 2010; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

dragon is Satan (12:3). The man child birthed from the woman is Jesus (12:5). The woman's birth pangs point to the future suffering of Israel during the tribulation (12:2). Heaven will erupt in war between Michael and his angels against Satan with his fallen angels (12:7). Satan will be defeated and he and his minion are cast out of heaven (12:9). The interpretation of John's vision led Vines to utilize the following prophetic twist:

Let me ask you a question? Have you received the Lord Jesus as your Savior? Have you asked him to forgive you of your sins? If the rapture occurs tonight you have no excuse. Will people be saved during the tribulation? Yes, the Bible teaches that there will be people saved. There will be 144,000 Jews saved (Revelation 7). There will also be a great multitude that no man can number. Out of all of the nations of the earth that will be saved, evidently through the testimony of the 144,000. But as best I understand the Scriptures, if you are here tonight you've heard the Gospel, you've heard how to be saved. You've heard your need of Christ. If you reject Christ tonight, and Jesus should come tonight or in the morning you would be left behind. You will be on this earth and it'll be too late. What you need to do is come to Jesus while you know you can.<sup>54</sup>

The mystery that clouds the timing of Christ's return, along with its immanence, led Vines to issue an urgent call to receive the gospel.

### **Principles and Pitfalls of the Evangelistic Twist**

The survey above does not offer an exhaustive classification of Vines' use of the evangelistic twist. Though it is closer to being a comprehensive treatment of the matter, it cannot be called such either. It demonstrates ten different nuances of the twist and attests to the way the rhetorical tool adapts to a variety of biblical texts from both the Old and New Testaments. The chapter now turns toward a listing of principles to follow and pitfalls to avoid when an expositor makes use of it in his preaching.

#### **Principles**

Several principles should guide a pastor as he uses the evangelistic twist in his

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<sup>54</sup>Jerry Vines, "The Woman. . .Dragon. . .Child" [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Revelation 12 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida 17 February 2002; accessed 21 October 2010; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

preaching. Most of his expository preaching will broach themes intended for his congregation's sanctification, but underlying all of the texts of the Bible is the need for the lost to trust Christ as Savior. I suggest the following principles.

**The Bible's rationale for evangelism bridges the gap from text to twist.**

The definition for Vines' rationale of the twist has already been stated, but for the purposes of offering principles of its usage, it merits repeating. If there is a literal heaven and hell awaiting every person after they die, and trusting Jesus as Savior is the only way to go to heaven, then the greatest assignment of Christians is to tell people about Jesus.<sup>55</sup> It is prudent that this rationale is perceivable in every sermon a pastor delivers. He must keep in mind that every passage of Scripture is fundamentally united by one author, the Holy Spirit, and one main subject, Jesus Christ and the salvation God offers through Him.<sup>56</sup> As the rationale for the great meta-narrative of the Bible guides his preparation, it will likely steer his use of an effective evangelistic twist.

**Twist the sermon, not the text.** The Holy Spirit's empowerment of a sermon will always come from the preacher's diligent preparation to unveil the authorial intent of a passage of Scripture. As the evangelistic twist turns the sermon toward evangelism, it should never detract from the audience's understanding of the text. As a preacher evaluates an evangelistic twist before its usage, he should critically ask, "Does this twist take away from the Central Idea of the Text (CIT) in any way?" If he answers yes, he needs to continue his search for the correct twist.

**The proposition often determines the type of twist to use.** The sermon's proposition is defined earlier in this chapter. Its function is to move the sermon from the

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<sup>55</sup>Jerry Vines, email correspondence by author, 24 October 2008.

<sup>56</sup>Vaughn Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 16-17.

biblical world to the modern world and apply it to the lives of an expositor's audience. Most likely, the sermon's evangelistic twist will be one of the last parts that a preacher develops before delivering the message. Knowing where to look for guidance will prove helpful in its development. Furthermore, when the evangelistic twist is derived from the proposition, it helps to ensure that the twist does not come at the expense of the passage's meaning.

**Consider the audience's need for a smooth transition.** One of the greatest attributes of the evangelistic twist is its usefulness in guiding a listener from a sanctifying subject to a gospel plea. The twist should be satisfying to the listener. Similar to the way that worship music readies the heart to receive the sermon, a strong evangelistic twist prepares the heart and mind to accept the gospel invitation. The expositor who does not use some kind of twist will move from sermon to invitation in an abrupt fashion.

**Connect with the audience's minds, wills, and hearts.** Adam Greenway summarizes the effect that conversion has on the mind, will and emotions: "In conversion the mind receives the factual content of the gospel, and in cooperation with the will and emotions, said *notitia* brings forth *assensus* and *fiducia*. The entirety of which occurs not by human initiative and work, but by the superintendence and grace wrought by God through His Holy Spirit on a person's entire composition—including mind, will, and emotions—to bring that person to the point of true repentance and faith."<sup>57</sup> At conversion, a person's intellect is engaged as he weighs the propositional truth claims of the gospel. His will assents to the facts of which he has embraced, and his heart is pricked as he encounters God's amazing love as it is demonstrated in the cross. The need to connect

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<sup>57</sup>Adam W. Greenway, "The Integration of Apologetics and Evangelism in the Ministry of Reuben Archer Torrey" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), 225.

with mind, will, and heart should be considered as an expositor considers the best way to move his sermon into a gospel invitation. A high quality evangelistic twist will be intellectually stimulating, magnify the authority of Christ, and make an emotional connection with the audience. It does not overlook the mind as an indispensable component of conversion.

**Keep the twist fresh and unpredictable.** I place this principle last for a reason. Freshness and innovation should remain a secondary concern for the preacher. His main goal in proclamation should be to preach what the text says. Yet, as is demonstrated in the survey above, there is no need for a preacher to use the same kind of twist each week. Scripture is filled with a variety of themes, authorial styles, and genres. That same diversity should be evident in a preacher's use of the twist.

### **Pitfalls to Avoid**

An expositor should consider the following pitfalls when implementing the evangelistic twist into his preaching. Some of them mirror the principles already mentioned, but their negative expressions capture the warnings that serious expositors need to remember when using the twist.

**Avoid sacrificing clarity for creativity.** The twist should be a natural fit for the sermon, on both a hermeneutical and homiletical level. The naturalness of it should always preside over its creativeness. A goal of proclamation should always be the clear presentation of the preachable unit. Similarly, a goal of the invitation should be the simple presentation of the gospel. An effective twist should enable both of these goals to be met.

**Avoid ruts of redundancy.** If the evangelistic twist becomes too predictable, an expositor will run the risk of being tuned out by his audience. They will accurately predict the way the invitation will be offered and intellectually disengage. Yet, believers

are edified when the gospel is proclaimed. There should be a joyful embrace of the gospel presentation and an expectation that an unbeliever will respond to its offer. An expositor's effort to avoid redundancy should help the listener obediently engage in the invitation when the gospel is presented.

**Avoid the appearance of obligation.** One of the great privileges of having the call to preach is the opportunity preach the gospel through sermons. The evangelistic twist, like the invitation, should be presented with zeal and excitement. The tool becomes ineffective if the audience senses the pastor gives the twist out of a sense of duty or obligation.

### **Conclusion**

The evangelistic twist is an element of vintage Vines expository preaching. It is an element of the mechanics of his homiletics that is reproducible, thus serving as a helpful model for how one blends expository preaching with evangelistic focus. Preaching does not have to be an either/or decision. The rationale of the Bible makes preaching a both/and. Vines' approach serves as a helpful model for how it can be accomplished. The dissertation will now shift from the mechanics of Vines' preaching to its content. His preaching and teaching through the book of Acts led his church to develop what he calls a "soul consciousness."<sup>58</sup> It was a primary way he equipped his church to do the work of the ministry (Eph 4:12).

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<sup>58</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 17 August 2006.

CHAPTER 5  
CALLING OUT THE SAVED: PERSONAL  
EVANGELISM THROUGH THE  
BOOK OF ACTS

**Introduction**

When Vines reminisces over the breadth of his pastoral ministry, he specifically credits his preaching through the book of Acts as a main reason for the evangelistic fruitfulness of his ministry. He stated in an interview: “When I went to a church, I would start a series in the book of Acts and a lot of people bought into it.”<sup>1</sup> This chapter examines the evangelistic principles that Vines taught in his expository preaching through Acts, but it does not end there. He authored Sunday School curriculum through Acts that partnered the pulpit with small group Bible study. He credited Sunday School as an effective place to train his congregation to do evangelism. Then, as Vines joined his church in a weekly visitation ministry, members of his congregation put into practice the principles he taught them through his preaching and writing. Preaching, teaching, and practice marked the three-pronged strategy for evangelism training at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida. He recently advised other pastors to consider doing likewise.<sup>2</sup>

The first two parts of this outreach strategy utilized Vines’ most significant contribution in the field of church evangelism. His ministry is a model of preaching and

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<sup>1</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 17 August 2006.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

teaching personal evangelism to the local church through the book of Acts. The chapter begins with an overview of his preaching and teaching on Acts. A discussion of his hermeneutic for the book ensues. Vines' interpretive method is reproducible. It results in the application of Acts for personal evangelism when followed. The chapter then builds toward the presentation of Vines' greatest evangelistic contribution: timeless principles of personal evangelism mined from the content of Acts.<sup>3</sup> Secondary applications of those truths will be offered, and then I conclude with evaluative remarks.

### **Overview of Personal Evangelism from Acts**

As already stated in the last chapter, Vines holds the view that preaching is at its best when it involves the exposition of entire books of the Bible.<sup>4</sup> His best preaching on personal evangelism hails from his systematic expository preaching through the book of Acts. Eventually, he wrote Sunday School curriculum to buttress his preaching. In both areas, he purports, "Acts is intended to make us personal witnesses."<sup>5</sup> It trains and motivates people to do the work that he calls "continuous lifestyle evangelism."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Thom Rainer's observation speaks to the value of Vines' treatment of Acts for personal evangelism. He states: "With the exception of M. Green's *Evangelism in the Early Church*, the subjects of evangelism and church growth in the Book of Acts have been unaccountably neglected in recent years." Thom S. Rainer, "Church Growth and Evangelism in the Book of Acts," in *Criswell Theological Review* 5.1 (1990): 57.

<sup>4</sup>Jerry Vines, *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 7.

<sup>5</sup>Jerry Vines, *Acts Alive: A Witnessing Church in the Twenty-First Century* (Atlanta, GA: n.p., 2007), 5.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 6. The term "continuous lifestyle evangelism," comes from Jerry Vines, "Evangelistic Preaching and the Book of Acts," *Criswell Theological Review* 5.1 (1990): 83. I prefer Vines' term "continuous lifestyle evangelism" over the term he uses in his later works, "lifestyle evangelism." His earlier term is better at conveying his approach to personal evangelism. It highlights the continuous aspect of a person's witness and also serves to slightly distinguish his approach from that of Joe Aldrich.

Vines' definition of lifestyle evangelism differs from Joe Aldrich who reasons: "The words of the gospel are to be incarnated before they can be verbalized."<sup>7</sup> This approach leads to the belief that one must first have a relationship with a non-believer before the gospel can be shared. Vines acknowledges that relationships with non-believers can lead to evangelistic effectiveness, but what he calls continuous lifestyle evangelism is quite different from Aldrich. Vines believes it entails an intentional effort to make gospel proclamation an integral part of a believer's everyday living. This application is a main component of his sermon series entitled "PowerBook" and his Sunday School curriculum called *Acts Alive*.

### **"PowerBook"**

An example of Vines preaching through Acts is his most recent sermon series through the book entitled "PowerBook." This series is comprised of thirty-three messages that were preached at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida from 30 April 2000 through 20 May 2001. One reason he chose to preach through Acts on this particular occasion was the impending Billy Graham Crusade scheduled in the middle of this year long series. Vines repeatedly encouraged his congregation to apply Acts' teaching on personal evangelism as they invited unsaved family members, friends, and acquaintances to the crusade.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Joe Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism: Learning to Open Your Life to Those Around You* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1993), 5-6.

<sup>8</sup>References to the November 2000 Billy Graham Crusade in Jacksonville, Florida are found in Jerry Vines, "Powerbook: Opening Doors of Faith" [on-line]; sermon manuscript of message delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 15 October 2000; accessed 27 March 2008; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet; Jerry Vines, "Powerbook: Three Tremendous Testimonies" [on-line]; sermon manuscript of message delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL on 5 November 2000; accessed 27 March 2008; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet; and Jerry Vines, "Powerbook: Opening Doors of Faith" [on-line]; sermon manuscript of message delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 12 November 2000; accessed 27 March 2008; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

In the opening sermon of the series, Vines explains his reason for the title “PowerBook:”

The book of Acts could well be called the ‘PowerBook.’ The key to the entire book is in verse 8. ‘Ye shall receive power after the Holy Spirit is come upon you.’ We are living in a time where people are very interested in power. We hear a great deal today in business circles about empowerment. That is, workers releasing within them the power which is theirs. There is power in the financial realm. We read about military power. We read about power in many circles of life. But here is a book and here is a statement that talks to us about the greatest power on the earth. It is the power of God. The power to change lives. The power to help people live the way they want to live and the power to tell others about the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.<sup>9</sup>

Through the power granted to Christians through the Holy Spirit, believers can experience authentic life change. Furthermore, they can access their Spirit-given power to share the gospel with others who do not know Christ.

The key verse for Vines’ interpretation of the book is Acts 1:8, and its key word is “witness.” Throughout the book, he found thirty-nine occurrences in which the word “witness” is used in either its verb or noun form.<sup>10</sup> He instills confidence in his audience by contending that any Christian can fulfill Christ’s command to be a witness. It only requires a believer to trust Him as personal Savior, experience the life change that immediately follows, and tell others, through personal testimony, of the transformation that Christ has wrought in his life.<sup>11</sup>

The remainder of Acts 1:8 describes both the outline for the content of Acts and the concentric circles of a witness’ reach. The believer begins in his Jerusalem, to which Vines gives the following application: “That’s where it all commences. Start

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<sup>9</sup>Jerry Vines, “Powerbook: The Power Book” [on-line]; sermon manuscript of message delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 30 April 2000; accessed 27 March 2008; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

where you are. Go home and tell someone.” His explanation continues to widen the witness’ scope:

Then he says, Judea and Samaria. You’ll find that as the book of Acts expands in ever widening circles. That’s where the witness continues. That’s your job. That’s your school. That’s your neighborhood. That’s your social circles. Telling people about Christ in that widening circle. Then he says to the uttermost parts of the earth. That’s where it concludes. We must have a heart as big as the world.<sup>12</sup>

Through the Holy Spirit’s power, Jesus promises that all of the necessary resources are provided for a Christian to carry out his command to be a witness.

Interestingly, Vines’ concentric circles of witnessing were less focused on a geographic widening than the believer’s witness to family and community. These foci comprise the majority of his application, and he rarely mentions a believer’s global witness. Though it could be reasoned that its application for personal evangelism kept with the spirit of preparation for the approaching evangelistic crusade, other samples of his writings attest otherwise. For example, in a journal article written ten years before the coming crusade, he offers his approach to preaching Acts and recognizes two primary opportunities that preaching the book affords expositors. First, its content gives ample opportunity to preach evangelistic sermons to the lost. Second, in comparatively greater measure, Acts can be skillfully used to equip believers to become effective in their personal evangelism.<sup>13</sup> Though Vines never explicitly limits his emphasis of personal evangelism to a believer’s family and community, he seldom applies the timeless truths of Acts to global missions.

### ***Acts Alive***

*Acts Alive* is the most recent edition of Vines’ Sunday School curriculum on personal evangelism from the book of Acts. He developed it over two decades. I will now

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Vines, “Evangelistic Preaching,” 83.

trace its development to demonstrate that its content is an outgrowth of his expository preaching through Acts and served to reinforce the principles of personal evangelism that he proclaimed from the pulpit.

Vines began to extend his work in Acts from pulpit to Bible study with the 1990 publication of an article titled, “Evangelistic Preaching and the Book of Acts.” In this article, he proposed five sermon outlines that serve as models of how an expositor can “utilize Acts as the basis for training and motivating people in continuous lifestyle evangelism. Through Acts we can glean principles and guidelines which can be used today.”<sup>14</sup> These five sermon titles and outlines expound upon particular texts in Acts that were the basic material from which he had trained “many Christians to witness effectively for our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>15</sup>

One year later the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention published a pamphlet of Sunday School lessons titled, *Witnesses Alive*. In a personal letter, Lloyd Elder, the President of the Sunday School Board, wrote to Vines and expressed his delight that progress was being made toward the publication of “the lifestyle evangelism series of lessons.”<sup>16</sup> After a series of revisions, *Witnesses Alive* became the finished product of the development of the titles and outlines from “Evangelistic Preaching.” It made slight modifications of these first lessons and expanded their number from five lessons to thirteen. The lessons’ overall aim was to help foster “A Witnessing Church in the Twentieth Century.”

Most recently, *Witnesses Alive* has been reformatted and renamed in its 2007

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Jerry Vines, *Witnesses Alive: A Witnessing Church in the Twentieth Century* (Nashville: The Sunday School Board, 1991), 2.

<sup>16</sup>Lloyd Elder to Jerry Vines, letter, 7 November 1989, Jerry Vines Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville.

version *Acts Alive*. Vines preferred this title from its inception, but to avoid copyright problems, it was not until recently that these concerns were remedied.<sup>17</sup> The lesson topics, titles, and texts all remain the same with slight modifications in the lessons' content intended to meet the needs of "A Witnessing Church in the Twenty-First Century."<sup>18</sup> Like its prior edition, it includes thirteen lessons that survey the book of Acts to teach principles of personal evangelism. The first lesson is built from Acts 1 and challenges believers to obey the Great Commission (1:8). The next lesson studies the growth of the early church in Jerusalem. The remaining eleven lessons present various principles for personal evangelism. He explains to the teachers using his curriculum, "Your study is designed merely to use Acts as the basis for training and motivation in life style evangelism."<sup>19</sup>

This chapter will later explore the specifics of Vines' application of Acts for personal evangelism. Vines' acknowledgment of the impact of these timeless truths on the churches he pastored, coupled with the evangelistic fruitfulness of these churches, makes his treatment of Acts worthy of study. Yet before these truths are presented, I will give attention to the hermeneutical method from which these truths were spawned.

### **A Prescriptive Hermeneutical Method for Acts**

The guiding thesis of this dissertation is that Vines' preaching ministry is a model of evangelistic focus. For anyone's preaching to be called a model of this kind, it must possess reproducible elements that help to increase the evangelistic focus of others who study them. His hermeneutical method is reproducible, particularly in regard to Acts.

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<sup>17</sup>Ross West to Jerry Vines, letter, 9 January 1990, Jerry Vines Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville.

<sup>18</sup>Vines, *Acts Alive*.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

It is prescriptive in nature with theological parameters that protect his interpretation from doctrinal error. In particular, it is the stage of his hermeneutic which he calls “the preliminary application” of a text that is most critical to this chapter, for these are the timeless truths that are the principles for evangelism throughout the ages.<sup>20</sup> An expositor who implements this hermeneutical method will not only be led to many of the same preliminary applications of the book for his practice and teaching of evangelism, but may find additional truths than discovered by Vines.

### **Interpretation**

As Vines asks the question, “What does the passage mean?” the purpose is always to find the Holy Spirit’s intended meaning of the text.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to interpreters who argue for multiple meanings of a text, Vines holds the view that a text has one primary meaning with multiple significances or applications of that meaning. He and David Allen explain,

By way of illustration, we may say that the one primary meaning of a text is like an iceberg. The tip protrudes above water and is analogous to ‘meaning,’ but further investigation continues to yield fuller and deeper ‘meaning’ just as the bulk of the iceberg is underwater. It is the same iceberg and hence the same meaning. The iceberg itself furnishes the constraints which guide and limit the interpreter’s potential elicitation of meaning. The *kind* of meaning we find in a text depends to some extent on the kind of meaning for which we are looking. Sometimes interpreters differ on a given text because they are looking for different kinds of meaning and from different perspectives. But it is the iceberg/text which determines the meaning capable of being drawn out, not the interpreters themselves, although they contribute to it.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>In Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 123, preliminary applications are not specifically defined, but I induce that they are timeless principles that help bring people to God through Christ and mold them into His image.

<sup>21</sup>Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 105.

<sup>22</sup>Jerry Vines and David Allen, “Hermeneutics, Exegesis, and Proclamation,” *Criswell Theological Review* 1.2 (1987): 316.

While Vines and Allen's illustration is unclear as to whether or not the full iceberg of meaning was in the mind of the biblical author, their analogy affirms that a single meaning was intended by the Spirit as He superintended the transmission of God's Word into an inerrant text. The work of the interpreter is to heed to Paul's instruction in 2 Timothy 2:15 and rightly divide the Word of truth.<sup>23</sup> Salvation has eternal implications, making it immensely important that the preacher present the specific, single iceberg meaning of the text. Thus, Vines suggests the following seven steps of interpretation.

The first step of hermeneutics is not something the preacher does, but rather, it is something he embraces. He seeks to minimize as much of his own subjectivity from his interpretation as possible. This goal leads Vines to affirm Walter C. Kaiser's approach to hermeneutics that he calls the *syntactical-theological* method.<sup>24</sup> Kaiser asserts there to be two key parts of a proper understanding of a text: (1) The way a biblical author puts words together, along with the meanings of the words themselves, leads to the discovery of the author's meaning; (2) biblical theology helps the interpreter know how antecedent revelation informed the biblical writer's understanding of the matter of which he wrote.<sup>25</sup> While Vines acknowledges a degree of subjectivity to be an inevitable part of interpretation, the interpreter's examination of a text's grammar, syntax, context, historical setting, cultural considerations, and theology (both biblical and systematic) will reduce as much subjectivity of an interpretation as possible.<sup>26</sup>

Step two in determining the text's meaning is contextual analysis. Vines and Shaddix assert, "Exposition demands that we be familiar with all aspects of the context in

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<sup>23</sup>Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 106.

<sup>24</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 89.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 89-90.

<sup>26</sup>Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 106-07.

which a particular element of truth was given.” This type of study begins with background study that uncovers theological developments along with historical and cultural nuances of a text. Repetitive reading of a passage provides an awareness of the flow of a book and how the selected text is connected with the book’s component parts. This kind of contextual reading is best explained through concentric circles. A particular text should be understood within its chapter. A particular chapter should be understood in relation to other chapters within the book. The interpreter should also look to the entirety of biblical revelation to insure the interpretation is in accord with the clear teaching of the whole Bible.<sup>27</sup>

The third step of the interpreter is to examine the structure of a text. Just as an automobile mechanic is familiar with the exploded diagram showing how each part of a motor fits with the whole motor, the preacher is wise to master the biblical languages so it can be revealed through structural analysis how the supporting prepositions, main subjects, verbs, and objects relate to one another around a single theme. Vines and Shaddix promise that since the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God, “Your best preaching will be done when your sermon design flows directly out of the structure of the text.”<sup>28</sup>

Vines’ fourth step encourages the interpreter to do word studies. To insure word studies are a helpful tool to aid the interpreter in arriving at the authorial intent of a passage, Vines and Shaddix encourage seven helpful steps: (1) Read the passage in the original language. (2) Look up the meaning of the key words with lexical aids, theological dictionaries, and other tools. (3) Determine how the word was used by the person who wrote it. (4) Determine the grammatical use of the word. (5) Be aware of the

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 107-10.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 110-12.

cultural usage of the word. (6) Determine the biblical emphasis of a word by using an exhaustive concordance and checking the number of its occurrences in the Old and New Testaments. (7) Analyze figurative language to help avoid absurd interpretations.<sup>29</sup> After tending to the passage's key words, attention to grammar will help the expositor continue removing subjectivity of the text. Discovering the tenses of words and how they are used in relation to one another will lead the interpreter toward the goal of interpreting a text as objectively as possible.

Step five in Vines' approach to hermeneutics is the checking of cross-references. This step draws from the entirety of the Bible and seeks to understand a passage in light of the way the verse fits within the Holy Spirit's thematic developments throughout Scripture. Vines and Shaddix conclude, "Very few passages in the Bible cannot be explained or made much clearer by other passages."<sup>30</sup>

The sixth step of interpretation is further interested in how a text relates to the rest of biblical revelation. Vines and Shaddix offer nine basic principles intended to lead to a right understanding of a text. (1) The *ethnic division* principle is concerned with the primary audience to whom the text was written. This principle, mostly concerned with the Jew, Gentile, and church, is imperative for the preacher to understand as he strives to make proper application. (2) The *first mention* principle asserts that the key to a subject's meaning is to understand the first time the subject is mentioned in Scripture. (3) The *full mention* principle explores the places in the Bible that a subject is given a comprehensive treatment in the Bible. For example, Vines and Shaddix mention 1 Corinthians 13 as a comprehensive treatment of the subject of love and Hebrews 11 as a comprehensive treatment of the subject of faith. (4) The *proportionate mention* principle calls attention to

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 112-15.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 115-16.

the amount of space given in Scripture to a particular theme. (5) The *repeated mention* principle reminds an interpreter that the development of a subject through Scripture's progressive revelation. Many of the doctrines of the Bible open like a flower as the doctrine is developed throughout Scripture. (6) The *gap* principle often sheds light on confusing passages of Scripture as it acknowledges that Scripture overlooks certain periods of time. This gap, such as the one found in Isaiah 61:1-2, highlights the theological relationship of historical events separated by a considerably large amount of time. (7) The *salvation/fellowship* principle helps the interpreter determine if the passage applies to Christians, non-Christians, or both. (8) The *threefold* principle recognizes that God's great truth of salvation is presented in a threefold way of justification, sanctification, and glorification. (9) The *recurrence* principle helps the interpretive process by recognizing that subjects in the Bible are often repeated from different viewpoints and with different purposes.<sup>31</sup>

Vines' seventh step of interpretation is to consult commentaries. The use of commentaries is intentionally mentioned last, for they should not be consulted until the other steps of interpretation have been completed. Commentaries can provide a rich source of information that the interpreter will find helpful and offer checkpoints of one's interpretation, shed additional light upon a passage, and potentially trigger one's thinking that leads to deeper waters of interpretation.<sup>32</sup>

These seven steps are reproducible and can be used in an expositor's sermon preparation whatever the text might be. Vines and Shaddix warn that at this point in a preacher's preparation, there will be temptation to begin writing the sermon. Yet, they advise resistance to this temptation. There is another crucial question that must be

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 116-18.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 118-20.

answered from his text: “What does the passage say about God and man?”<sup>33</sup> This question transitions an expositor’s preparation from interpretation into the discovery of a text’s implications.

### **Implication**

The implication stage of his hermeneutical method is the critical stage for Vines’ discovery of principles of personal evangelism from Acts. Vines and Shaddix explain its goal to be the determining of the theological implications of the text. They assert, “Before the preacher can apply the text to the modern world, he must determine what it says to all people of all time.”<sup>34</sup>

Vines describes a three-fold process of determining implication. First, the interpreter must uncover the theological significance of a passage. Within the Bible is a unified theology centered upon the progressive unfolding of revelation from the Old Testament to the New. The Scriptures are an unfolding of John 3:16, for God’s great theme of redemption runs from Genesis to Revelation. This theme speaks of God’s love for man, His grief at man’s sin, and His sending of a Savior to make man’s redemption from sin possible. Thus, Vines sees great purpose in preaching the Old Testament. He acknowledges that Old Testament history, typology, and prophetic announcements were preparation for the coming Christ. In the New Testament one finds the correct interpretation of the Old. Agreeing with Kaiser, Vines believes that every passage of Scripture contains at its roots antecedent theological content. He believes: “The words of a passage should be examined in light of their historical usage *up to that time* in God’s revelation, not according to the meanings that evolved subsequent to the revelation under

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 120.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

consideration.”<sup>35</sup>

Vines’ pursuit of the theological significance of each text leads him to conclude that Jesus must be preached in every sermon.<sup>36</sup> While an interpreter should look for Christ in every passage, Vines does not believe that the entire message should be built around that pursuit. On the hermeneutical spectrum of Walter Kaiser’s antecedent revelation and Graeme Goldsworthy’s Christ-centered approach, in his writings and admissions in his interviews he leans more toward the hermeneutical method of Kaiser. Yet, he admits that the best approach to preaching Christ from all the Scriptures is a both/and rather than an either/or approach.<sup>37</sup>

The second part of the process of arriving at a text’s implication is the identification of timeless truths. Rather than spiritualizing a passage, Vines argues that the Bible is relevant to any person living in any era. Therefore, each passage contains timeless truths that issue forth from its theological foundation. This part of Vines’ process borrows heavily from Kaiser’s “principlization” process.<sup>38</sup> The goal of interpretation is to discover the timeless truths of Scripture and then state them in principles that apply to the needs of a contemporary audience. Vines and Shaddix conclude, “This kind of

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 120-21.

<sup>36</sup>Several times in his messages he makes statements such as, “When you preach Jesus Christ you are doing good preaching.” In Jerry Vines, “Powerbook: Oh What a Day!” [on-line]; sermon manuscript of an exposition of Acts 2:1-41 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 21 May 2000; accessed 27 March 2008; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet. Also, see Vines, “Powerbook: O What a Name.” In “Powerbook: Desert Encounters,” when preaching the Bible, he states, “It’s Jesus, Jesus, Jesus all the way through.”

<sup>37</sup>Jerry Vines, e-mail correspondence with the author, 24 November 2008.

<sup>38</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 152.

‘preliminary application’ is vitally more important than the secondary application made to the nuances of each generation.”<sup>39</sup>

This element is the most notable part of the implication process found in Vines’ teaching of personal evangelism through Acts. The preliminary applications of Acts transcend the restraints of a particular time and culture, enabling a Christian to obediently fulfill her responsibility as a personal evangelist. Vines discovers many of these timeless truths from the text and points them to the needs of a contemporary audience. The promise laced in his hermeneutical method is that when it is followed, further timeless truths are likely to be discovered.

The final part of the implication of a passage is to allow God’s truth to impact the expositor. Vines calls this step “self-application.”<sup>40</sup> A text’s proper interpretation requires that the interpreter examine his life in light of the truths discovered in a passage. Vines reasons: “I cannot preach to others what has not been first of all preached to myself.” This is where a preacher will determine whether or not God’s anointing will rest upon a particular preached sermon. When God’s Word is communicated incarnationally, through a human vessel, it will most powerfully be applied to the life of the listener.<sup>41</sup> Thus, for Vines to preach and write often on personal evangelism, he had to practice it. He felt that this accountability validated his preaching. Perhaps it is what led to his

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<sup>39</sup>Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 123-24. In Robert Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 39, Stein gives a definition of implications that is helpful to understanding the preliminary applications that Vines seeks to discover. I find these terms nearly synonymous. Stein’s definition reads: “Implications are those meanings in a text of which the author was unaware but nevertheless legitimately fall within the pattern of meaning he willed.”

<sup>40</sup>Vines, *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 95.

<sup>41</sup>Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 124-25.

anointing.<sup>42</sup>

### **Theological Parameters of a Prescriptive Hermeneutic**

I have already established the importance of the theological implications of a text in Vines' hermeneutic for any book. Vines' treatment of Acts merits further explanation of these matters, for a particular aspect of his theological treatment of the book is unique in comparison to his interpretation of every other book in the Bible. He asserts Acts to be a book of historical record, yet there are other historical books of the Bible.<sup>43</sup> It specifically documents pertinent events of the early church, but other books in the Bible also record events of significance to Christianity. What makes Acts unique is that it accounts for a historical period that Vines describes as being a transitional dispensation.<sup>44</sup> This conclusion affects his interpretation in three primary ways. First, it

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<sup>42</sup>Vines does not directly correlate his practice of personal evangelism to the Spirit's anointing of his preaching. Yet, I do think it is a reasonable correlation to assert when one considers the evangelistic fruitfulness of his ministry as evinced through the annual baptism figures reported by the churches he pastored.

<sup>43</sup>Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 100. In a chapter entitled, "The Issue of Historical Transition," John MacArthur details a similar treatment of Acts as that which is espoused by Vines. He, with Vines, explains Acts to be a book of history, for he writes, "Christian scholars and teachers have always regarded Acts as the New Testament book of history." Later, he asserts, "The only teachings in the Book of Acts that can be called normative (absolute) for the church are those that are doctrinally confirmed elsewhere in Scripture." See John F. MacArthur, *The Charismatics: A Doctrinal Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 85.

<sup>44</sup>Vines, "The Powerbook." Vines builds part of his transitional view of Acts from his observation of where the book is positioned in the canon. He states: "Think if you didn't have this book in your Bible. You are reading through your Bible and you read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. You come to the conclusion of the gospels about the story of Jesus. You end up with Jesus on the Mount of Olives ascending back to heaven. Then you turn to the book of Romans if there is no book of Acts and you read about a man you've never heard of named Paul. He's in the city of Rome in prison for his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You wouldn't really know where you are. So, the book of Acts is a transition. It is a bridge that takes us from the Gospels and the life of Christ, into the life of the church as Jesus continues to do His work. Jesus Christ is not through with His work. Jesus Christ is still at work in this world. We see a continuation."

prevents his theology and practices from being affected by passages in Acts that stand in conflict with normative New Testament patterns. Second, it intensifies the need for an interpreter to turn to doctrinal books and let Scripture interpret Scripture. Third, it coincides with Vines' cessationist position.

This transitional dispensational view is the primary safeguard that Vines implements to protect the soundness of his preliminary applications. It harnesses his interpretation of Acts so events unique to the book are not misused as paradigms for the evangelistic practices of the churches that followed. Doctrinal considerations that weigh into the prescribed principles of Acts are to be supported by other books.

The clearest demonstration of Vines' view found in his preaching of Acts is his explanation for the Samaritans' delayed reception of the Holy Spirit in Acts 8:14-17. Philip had preached the gospel in Samaria and a multitude of his listeners responded. Breaking from the simultaneous nature of the "salvation package,"<sup>45</sup> time elapsed between the time the Samaritans received the Word of God and when they received the Holy Spirit. He explained:

You have to keep in mind that we are in a transitional time in the book of Acts between the Old Testament economy and the New Testament economy. A transition is going on between law and grace. One dispensation is ending and another dispensation is beginning. So, the apostles had a very important role in those transitional years. Their responsibility was to lay foundations and to be used of the Holy Spirit to write what you and I have in our New Testaments today. In verse 15 it says when they came down, they prayed for the Samaritans that they might receive the Holy Spirit 'for as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. They then laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.' This is different. That's why it is dangerous to build doctrine on these transitional chapters in the book of Acts. This is not the pattern for today.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>For an explanation of "the salvation package," refer to chapter 3.

<sup>46</sup>Jerry Vines, "Powerbook: Desert Encounters" [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Acts 8:26-40 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 30 July 2000; accessed 27 March 2008; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

This event, that breaks form from an orthodox view of regeneration in which the Holy Spirit is received simultaneously to conversion, is descriptive of this account of Acts 8 and should not be considered when developing one's theology or prescribed principles for contemporary application. This account is one of the reasons that Vines discourages looking to Acts as the foundation for theological positions to establish patterns for today.

Vines' preaching from Acts 1:26 offers another example of his interpretive fence. He explained of this passage that the disciples cast lots to select Judas' replacement for the following reason:

That's an Old Testament practice. That's why you don't do everything that's done in the book of Acts. Some things are in transition. Some are holdovers from the Old Testament. They fade away and then New Testament standards and principles come into play. We don't use lots today. In those days they would engrave on a stone the names of the individuals. They would put them in a vessel or in their lap and they would shake them until one came out and that was to be the choice. Today we use our common sense. We use prayer. We use scripture. And on that basis God gives us leaders to serve in an upper room kind of church.<sup>47</sup>

There was a time the practice of casting lots to determine God's will was acceptable (1:16). When Peter made the decision to use it to decide the twelfth disciple, the Old Testament supported its practice. The promised Counselor had yet to come, and the New Testament canon had yet to be revealed. Today, the Bible is complete. The Spirit has now been poured out on every believer, and the transitional dispensation has given way to the present church age. Since every believer is given the Holy Spirit and has access to the full counsel of God's Word, casting lots to determine God's will is not to be practiced today.

Another instance of Vines' application of his transitional dispensation view comes from his exposition of Acts 4:23-37. Vines' understanding of what it means for a believer to be filled with the Spirit is critical to his treatment of this text. He explains:

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<sup>47</sup>Jerry Vines, "Powerbook: The Upper Room" [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Acts 1:13-26 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 7 May 2000; accessed 27 March 2008; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

Now, for the 3rd time in the 31st verse they are all filled with the Holy Spirit. The filling of the Holy Spirit is not a once-for-all matter. The baptism is once-for-all. The moment you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior, I Cor. 12:13 says, "You are baptized by one spirit into the body." That's a positional matter. It happens one time. You do not pray for the baptism. But the Bible teaches in Ephesians 5:18, "be not drunk with wine wherein is excess but be filled with the spirit." The tense of the verb indicates that it is something that is to happen frequently. It is not a once-for-all experience. It is not a second-blessing experience. I believe in the second blessing. I also believe in the third blessing. I believe in the 4th blessing. I believe in the 1000th blessing. What we need is to daily be filled with the Holy Spirit. To be filled with the spirit means that you are yielded to the control of the Holy Spirit over your life.<sup>48</sup>

Vines' hermeneutic looks to these doctrinal books of 1 Corinthians and Ephesians to uncover the theological significance of the passage. He uses Scripture to interpret Scripture. More specifically, he uses other books to set the parameters for the doctrine he exhumes from the historical narrative book of Acts. Acts supports sound theology, but orthodoxy cannot be determined from Acts alone. Thus, in regard to the baptism of the Spirit and the filling of the Spirit, Vines holds the view that every believer is once baptized by the Spirit upon conversion according to 1 Corinthians 12:13. Additionally, the believer is filled with the Spirit numerous times in his sanctification.

A final example of Vines' transitional dispensation is the way he critiques a Pentecostal view of speaking in tongues. Vines holds a cessationist view of this spiritual gift. His position on γλῶσσα in Acts 2:4 and 2:11 is that its combination with διάλεκτος in verse 8 makes clear that on the day of Pentecost the disciples were given the supernatural gift of speaking in foreign languages. He asserts that in Acts 10:44-46, 11:17, and Acts 19:2, "it unquestionably refers to foreign language."

In the doctrinal books of the New Testament, tongues are mentioned only in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Yet, the gift of tongues Paul encountered in Corinth differed from the

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<sup>48</sup>Jerry Vines, "Powerbook: What a Prayer Meeting!" [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Acts 4:23-37 delivered at the First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL on 25 June 2000; accessed 27 March 2008; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

references found in Acts. Vines explains:

Every time the word “tongues” is used, it is the translation of the Greek word *glossa*. Paul uses it strictly to mean the gift of foreign languages. But, surprisingly enough, the Corinthian Christians were not speaking a foreign language. The Corinthian believers were involved with something quite different than the movement among the believers in Jerusalem.<sup>49</sup>

Pointing to 1 Corinthians 14:2, the problem that Paul confronted in Corinth was believers who were ecstatically babbling. Vines called this a “Pentecostal imitation.”<sup>50</sup> Since these believers had been Christians for only a short time, Paul did not want to squelch their enthusiasm (1 Thess 5:19-20). Yet, he still needed to confront the issue of their tongues, believing it be a distraction to their spiritual growth. So Paul established guidelines that he knew would eliminate the problem if the Corinthians followed them (1 Cor 14:26-37).<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Paul’s guidelines stemmed the tide of the Corinthians’ misunderstanding of the gift of tongues until the completion of the canon. Vines asserts:

“Where there are tongues, they will be stilled,” Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 13:8. In fact, they do cease. They’re finished. From here on out, no tongues. There is no reference to tongues in Romans or Galatians. The subject is not mentioned in Ephesians or Colossians. Nor do we find it in Jude or Revelation. Search the rest of the New Testament books. Tongues are not mentioned.<sup>52</sup>

Vines concludes his argument: “When the full revelation of Scripture was completed, the gift of knowledge ceased.”<sup>53</sup> It is thus implied that the completion of the Bible ended the gift of tongues as well. Moreover, tongues ceased because they were a

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<sup>49</sup>Jerry Vines, *The Corinthian Confusion: A Study in 1 Corinthians* (n.p.), 227-28.

<sup>50</sup>Jerry Vines, *Spirit Life: Experience the Power, Excitement, and Intimacy of God’s Shaping Hand* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 170-72.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 177.

sign to unbelieving Jews (1 Cor 14:21), and because the gift belonged to the infancy period of the church (1 Cor 13:11).<sup>54</sup> Both textually and theologically, Vines does not believe the early church practice of tongues to be prescriptive for the church today. Since speaking in tongues was a gift given by the Holy Spirit in a unique season of transition, when the complete canon of Scripture was fully revealed, the partial and temporary gifts were abolished.<sup>55</sup>

The theology described above demonstrates the way Vines' hermeneutic for Acts is directed by dispensational theology. In particular, the transitional nature of Acts led him to treat the book uniquely from other books of the Bible. I did not find any instances in his treatment of Acts in which a doctrinal position of his germinated in the book itself. Yet, it is an overstatement to claim it a hermeneutical principle of Vines' that one does not acquire doctrine from historical books. If this be the case, the Great Commission passage from Matthew 28:19-20, a critical text in Vines' theological method, would be a non-doctrinal text since it is written in the historical narrative book of Matthew.<sup>56</sup> The theology he asserts in his sermons is backed by biblical texts from other books. Therefore, Vines views Acts as a book that affirms good theology, but not a book that determines it.

Another issue requires an answer before shifting to the fruit of Vines' hermeneutical method as it relates to personal evangelism. An interpreter does not have to embrace his transitional dispensational view to benefit from his hermeneutical method. If the reader rejects the dispensational theology described above, the other aspects of Vines' hermeneutical method, along with his preliminary and secondary applications,

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 226-28.

<sup>56</sup>Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 100. Vines claims the literature present in the four gospels is historical narrative.

should still be considered. The next section of this chapter will remove the dispensational fence that Vines erects to protect his prescriptive use of Acts by consulting other trusted voices of scholarship on Acts. The commentators listed below do not straightforwardly concede a dispensational lens through which to interpret Acts. As will be attested to below, none of the different views of Acts affects its preliminary and secondary applications for personal evangelism.

### **Removal of the Dispensational Fence**

To demonstrate how Vines' dispensational considerations do not undermine his hermeneutical method or his applications, consider the positions of non-dispensational scholars on the four passages of Acts mentioned above. Vines' position on the delay of the Samaritans' reception of the Holy Spirit in Acts 8:15-17 is that Acts is a book whose content describes a transitional dispensation. Thus, a narrative account like that of Philip's ministry in Samaria should not be a component of the development of one's doctrine. David G. Peterson offers a different explanation for how one is to place these verses within a biblical theological framework. In regard to soteriological concerns, both Peterson and Vines arrive at the same application. Peterson answers:

But why had the Holy Spirit *not yet come upon any of them* (*epipetōkos*, 'fallen upon'; cf. 10:44; 11:15)? Given the promise that those who repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ will have their sins forgiven and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38-39), are we to conclude that there was something deficient in the faith of the Samaritans? Luke seems to be at pains to stress the orthodoxy of Philip's preaching, the close attention paid by the Samaritans to what they heard, and the genuineness of their response (8:5-6, 12; contrast the 'disciples' in 19:1-5). Was it because there were no apostles present? Luke later makes it clear that the Spirit can be given when the person baptizing is not an apostle (9:17-18). Was it because they needed to receive the Spirit in a fuller sense, for inspiration, or for the reception of charismatic gifts? Was it because they specifically needed the Spirit to be given to them in this way to empower them for mission? The idea that they needed more of the Spirit is ruled out by Luke's insistence that *the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them*. With the words *not yet* (*oudepō*), Luke indicates that the Samaritan incident provides 'a clear break with the "norm" we might expect from Acts 2:38-39'. The best explanation is that God himself withheld the Spirit until the coming of Peter and John, 'in order that the Samaritans might be seen to be fully incorporated into the community of Jerusalem Christians who had received salvific purpose, not because of an inadequate response on the part of the Jerusalem church, not to impart the Spirit because of their office. Significantly, in 8:25 they return to

Jerusalem to report what God has been doing. The delay in the sending of the Spirit put the Samaritans somewhat in the position of the Jewish disciples before Pentecost. They had a genuine faith in the risen Lord, but had not yet received the promised Holy Spirit. Neither the experience of those first disciples nor the experience of the Samaritans can be made the basis for a two-stage view of Christian initiation, either in a Catholic or Pentecostal sense. These were unique events in salvation history, not the normal pattern of initiation known to Luke.<sup>57</sup>

Peterson seconds Vines' position of the non-normative nature of this particular passage. He explains the Spirit's delay to be a special circumstance prompted by the need of God to make clear to the disciples that God had acted. Acts 1:8 progresses toward the Great Commission's fulfillment, for the gospel has advanced, at this juncture, from Judea to Samaria. Vines rejects the delay of the Holy Spirit as normative based on its occurrence in a transitional dispensation, where Peterson views it as a non-normative act of God to validate the gospel's spread to Samaria for the Apostles' benefit. Neither of these views affect Vines' assertion found in the forthcoming section that Philip's ministry in Samaria is paradigmatic for cultivative witnessing.

Another example of Vines' support of his transitional dispensation view is his explanation of the disciples' casting lots in Acts 1:26. Though this practice is affirmed by the Old Testament in 1 Chronicles 26:13, its practice should give way to New Testament standards and principles. John Polhill, another Acts scholar who rejects a dispensational view of the book, espouses:

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<sup>57</sup>David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 286-87. F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 170; Bruce purports the benefit of the delay of the Spirit to be more for the Samaritans than the Jerusalem church: "In the present instance, some special evidence may have been necessary to assure the Samaritans, so accustomed to being despised as outsiders by the people of Jerusalem, that they were fully incorporated into the new community of the people of God. I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, in vol. 5 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, ed. Leon Morris (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 166-67. Marshall supports the same view as Peterson. He asserts: "It is wholly unlikely that a *second* reception of the Spirit was conveyed by the laying on of hands, perhaps accompanied by unusual charismatic gifts; verse 16 completely rules out this possibility."

The method was likely the one depicted in the Old Testament. Marked stones were placed in a jar and shaken out. The one whose stone fell out first was chosen (cf. 1 Chr 26:13f.). Some have wanted to see Matthias selected by vote of the church, but the text points more to the ancient procedure of lot-casting. One should not be put off by the ‘chance’ element. In the Old Testament the outcome was always seen to be determined by God. That was probably the consideration in this case. Before Pentecost, before the presence of the Spirit to lead it, the church sought the direction of God and used the Old Testament procedure of securing divine decision. After Pentecost the church in Acts makes its own decisions under the direction of the Spirit. In this particular instance it was all the more important that the decision be the Lord’s not theirs. Like his first selection of the Twelve, its constituency was his to determine.<sup>58</sup>

Vines rejects the practice of casting lots as normative based on its happening during a transitional period. Polhill reasons differently, yet still supports the view that the early church no longer needed to cast lots after the day of Pentecost. Neither view hinders Vines’ position described below that Peter’s careful handling of God’s Word is a quality found in faithful witnesses of all generations.

Another aspect of Vines’ transitional dispensational view of Acts is discussed above in his treatment of the believers being filled with the Spirit in 4:31. He consults other doctrinal books when forming the doctrinal positions that guide his interpretation of Acts.<sup>59</sup> As is detailed above, his view of a believer’s relationship to the Holy Spirit is that every believer is once baptized of the Spirit, but is repeatedly given a fresh filling. Furthermore, a believer’s effective witness evinces that he is indeed filled with the Spirit. Polhill offers a similar conclusion:

Immediately they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word with boldness, just as they had petitioned. This was not a “second Pentecost.” They had already received the Spirit. The Spirit had helped Peter and John in a mighty way before the Sanhedrin. It was a fresh filling, a renewed awareness of the Spirit’s

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<sup>58</sup>John B. Polhill, *Acts*, in vol. 26 of *The New American Commentary*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 95. Peterson, *Acts*, 128-29, Marshall, *Acts*, 72, and John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts of The Bible Speaks Today*, ed. John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 58, affirm the observation that lots cease to be used after the Spirit’s arrival at Pentecost.

<sup>59</sup>Jerry Vines, *Spirit Life*, 170. Doctrinal books are the twenty-one books in the New Testament that follow Acts.

power and presence in their life and witness. This was not an ephemeral ecstatic manifestation but a fresh endowment of power for witness that would continue.<sup>60</sup>

This is but another example of how one's acceptance or rejection of dispensational theology has little impact on Acts' application for witnessing. While dispensational theology may affect other matters of doctrinal concern, it does not compromise Vines' conclusions for personal evangelism.

Vines holds together his transitional dispensation view of Acts with a cessationist position in regard to the gift of speaking in tongues. With the completion of the canon, there no longer exists the need to validate the Spirit's presence in a person's life through the demonstration of the gift of tongues.<sup>61</sup> Vines, along with Polhill, Bruce, and others, rejects a non-rational discourse view of glossolalia.<sup>62</sup> However, this is where congruency in their positions ends. Neither Polhill nor Bruce write in support of a cessation position. Yet Sinclair Ferguson, who with Bruce and Polhill does not advocate dispensational theology, does agree with Vines by leaning toward a cessation position:

Despite disclaimers, the issue at stake here is the sufficiency of Scripture for the directing of the church and the individual. God's revelation has always been sufficient for each stage of redemptive revelation. The climax of redemption in Christ was accompanied by a correspondingly sufficient revelation in the Scriptures, so that the principle of scriptural sufficiency which Paul describes (2 Tim. 3:16-17), while rooted in the Old Testament, now includes both Testaments. But while the New Testament was being written, the guiding principle, or canon, of the early church was multiplex: the Old Testament, the apostolic directives, prophecies, and those parts of the New Testament already written. Now this multiplex canon, or rule

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<sup>60</sup>Polhill, *Acts*, 150. Bruce, *Acts*, 31, Bruce positions himself with Polhill by acknowledging that though the description here is reminiscent of the description of Pentecost, it is not a duplicate of the Pentecost experience "when for the first time they were all 'filled with the Spirit.'" Peterson, *Acts*, 203 and Marshall, *Acts*, 114 both reject the notion that this account is a second Pentecost, with Marshall stating further: "It has even been suggested that originally the tradition described an outbreak of speaking in tongues," which he declares to be "unlikely."

<sup>61</sup>Vines, *Spirit Life*, 175.

<sup>62</sup>See Polhill, *Acts*, 98-99; Bruce, *Acts*, 52-53; Peterson, *Acts*, 134; Stott, *Acts*, 66; and Marshal, *Acts*, 74-75; and William J. Larkin, Jr., *Acts*, in vol. 5 of *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, ed. Grant Osborne, D. Stuart Briscoe, and Haddon Robinson (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1995), 50.

of faith and life, gives way to a single canon: the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. They now contain ‘everything we need God to tell us for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly.’<sup>63</sup>

Ferguson later asserts that preaching God’s Word is the central gift of the Spirit given to the church. Addressing the experiential claims of the charismatic church’s emphasis on speaking in tongues, he questions, “Will it prove to be one of the enigmas of contemporary church life, when viewed from some future age, that a demise of the quality of and confidence in the exposition of Scripture, and a fascination with the immediacy of tongues, interpretations, prophecy and miracles, were coincidental?”<sup>64</sup>

Once again, the dispensational view that Vines holds does not bear on his application of Acts for personal evangelism. The gift of tongues does not factor into his principles of personal evangelism, though it does deter from them.<sup>65</sup> Yet, he considers paramount the careful teaching and preaching of Scripture.

Of the aforementioned scholars of Acts, some may admit to having some dispensational leanings, yet I did not find these leanings to be clearly asserted in the commentaries above. These works took down Vines’ dispensational fence and did little to impact his prescriptive hermeneutic of Acts for personal evangelism. Thus, dispensational and covenant theologians alike can benefit from his treatment of Acts.

The chapter will now transition toward what Vines refers to as the “preliminary” and “secondary” applications of Acts that are the fruit of his prescriptive hermeneutic. In the spirit of Vines’ hermeneutical method, I give greater weight to “preliminary applications,” for they are the timeless truths of Scripture stated in

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<sup>63</sup>Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 231.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>65</sup>Vines, *Spirit Life*, 180, Vines states: “It seems to me that tongues is a detour off the main highway of the Christian life. What is the function of the Holy Spirit’s power? Acts 1:8 can’t be missed: ‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes no you; and you will be my witnesses.’”

principles that guide and direct believers living in any era from the time of Acts' authorship to the present. I will then follow this section with "secondary applications" found in Vines' treatment of Acts that are specific to his particular era and ministry setting. The instillation of these principles into the lives of his congregants was largely responsible for the evangelistic fruit that marked Vines' ministry.

### **Preliminary Applications for Personal Evangelism**

The content of Acts has applications of personal evangelism for the church of today. As many pastors look for answers as to how to motivate their churches to be effective evangelistically, these sections offer key insight. They discuss the principles that First Baptist Jacksonville, Florida "bought into" that largely attributed to their twenty-four years of averaging 835 baptisms a year.

### **A Christian's Most Important Activity is to Witness**

Foundational to lifestyle evangelism is every believer's responsibility to be a witness. Much like Malcolm Yarnell concludes of Balthasar Hubmaier and William Carey, Vines views the Great Commission passage of Acts 1:8 to be normative for all Christians.<sup>66</sup> Thus, Jesus' imperative to be a witness is not a suggestion, it is a command.<sup>67</sup> Vines explains Acts to be a record of the witnessing of the early Christians as they moved "from Jerusalem to the capital of their world, Rome."<sup>68</sup> A believer performs a primary function of "normal Christianity" through witnessing. A witness is

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<sup>66</sup>Malcolm Yarnell, "The Heart of a Baptist" (A White paper from the CTR, December 2005) [on-line]; accessed 4 October 2010; available from <http://www.BaptistTheology.org>; Internet, 2.

<sup>67</sup>Vines, *Witnesses Alive*, 7.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

“someone who has experienced something and can tell about it.”<sup>69</sup> Like a witness in a courtroom that is sworn in to tell the truth, a witness for Jesus has received Christ as Savior, is changed by Jesus, and now lives a better life. As he witnesses, he tells others what Jesus means to him.<sup>70</sup>

Acts 1:13-26 discusses the essential preparations for witnessing. The disciples’ example of spending ten days in prayer before Pentecost demonstrates how necessary it is for a believer to be an instrument to bring others to Jesus (1:13). In the same vein of these early Christians, a believer committed to life-style evangelism will engage in daily prayer. Furthermore, a witness must be a person, who much like Peter, believes that the Bible “speaks with fresh power today.” In order for Judas to be replaced, Peter’s knowledge of Scripture demonstrated how the Scriptures applied to their current situation. Witnesses need to possess the same skill, and through daily Bible reading, their desire to be a daily witness will be enhanced.<sup>71</sup> A sanctifying effect of daily prayer and Bible study will be that they enable a person to become an effective witness. Vines instructs: “You witness by the consistency of your life, but you also witness by what you say with your lips.”<sup>72</sup> Prayer and the study of Scriptures are essential for both aspects of a witness’ responsibility to live and speak the gospel.

### **Personal Evangelism Involves Winning and Growing**

Vines asserts the secret of church growth, as found in Acts 2, is that the Spirit-filled experience of the disciples is not reserved for the pastor and staff alone: “It is for

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<sup>69</sup>Vines, *Acts Alive*, 9.

<sup>70</sup>Vines, *Witnesses Alive*, 6.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>72</sup>Vines, *Acts Alive*, 9.

every one of us.”<sup>73</sup> A church that is effective in winning people to Christ is comprised of a congregation of witnessing people. Acts 2:1-40 demonstrates that an important aspect of personal evangelism is sharing the gospel for conversion growth, but that is only part of a witness’ responsibility. According to Acts 2:41-47, a witness must also do the work of discipleship in caring for new converts. Thus, personal evangelism entails both winning the lost and growing new Christians in their faith.

There are two paradigmatic insights that Vines incorporates into his teaching of evangelism from Acts 2. The first is that Peter’s Pentecost sermon shows qualities of an effective gospel presentation (2:1-40). The message should speak directly to the hearts of people and address the contemporary problems of the day. Its presentation is centered upon the Bible. Moreover, Jesus should be central to the message.<sup>74</sup>

A second paradigm for witnessing is discovered in the discipling of the new believers who were saved during Peter’s Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:41-47). Following the picture of how the Jerusalem church cared for its new converts, Vines suggests six necessary steps for discipling new Christians:

1. Assurance of salvation is so important to a new Christian. Satan can’t get his soul, but he can rob him of needed assurance. A critical passage an expositor should use to teach assurance is 1 John 5:11-13.
2. New converts also need assurance of forgiveness. Too many new Christians somehow feel they must be perfect after they are saved. Use 1 John 1:9 to explain how they are to deal with sins they may commit.
3. Bible study is important; 1 Peter 2:2 compares the Word of God with milk for a new baby. Encourage new converts to begin to read the Gospel of John. New Christians should start in one of the easier books to understand.
4. Next, share with new Christians the great opportunity of prayer. Imagine, we can talk to the God of the universe! Show new Christians Philippians 4:6-7. This passage is helpful in understanding what prayer is all about.
5. Witnessing is a key to continued growth for Christians. Share with new converts Matthew 28:19-20. Talk to them about baptism as their first public witness for Christ. Also, encourage them to share their salvation experience with a family member or friend.

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<sup>73</sup>Vines, *Witnesses Alive*, 11.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

6. Finally, involvement in a local church is vital to being a growing Christian. Hebrews 10:24-25 underscores the importance of faithfulness to the church. Talk about the ministry of your church. Offer to bring new members to the services.<sup>75</sup>

It is through winning and growing new believers that a church fulfills its responsibility in personal evangelism. These are not requirements of just the pastor and staff, for every believer is called to be a witness.

### **God Gives Unexpected Opportunities to Witness**

Acts 3 documents Peter and John's encounter with a crippled man at the gate of the temple called Beautiful. Instantly the man was healed. The healing was an instrument used by God to prepare the beggar for the greater miracle of his salvation.

Vines stated:

The miracle just set the stage for the message. The main thing is the preaching of the Word. That's where the substance of it all is. That's where the power of it all is. It's the message. It always helps to have a miracle before you preach the message. It always helps to have a crowd of folks who have experienced the miracle-working power of salvation when you are proclaiming the message. I'm going to preach for souls, forgiving your sins, saving your soul, changing your life. I'm doing that surrounded by a great host of miracles.<sup>76</sup>

The greatest miracle of the Scriptures is the transformative work wrought by God when a sinner who is dead in his trespasses and sin is raised to new life in Christ. God used Peter as an instrument of physical healing, but more importantly, a man who was crippled in his depravity encountered the One who saves him out his spiritual lameness.

Vines titled his lesson from this account as "Witnessing on the Way." He challenges believers to recognize the cries of spiritually crippled people whom God

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>76</sup>Jerry Vines, "Powerbook: What a Beautiful Gate!" [on-line]; sermon manuscript of an exposition of Acts 8:26-40 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 30 July 2000; accessed 27 March 2008; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

regularly places in their paths. In the same way that it was natural for Peter to witness to this beggar, the Holy Spirit empowers every believer to witness in a way that is natural to him as he responds to the authentic needs of people. Vines exhorts:

When you have the joy of seeing someone you witnessed to along the way come to the Lord, you get in on what the Christian life is all about. There is really nothing to compare with it. We may not see such an instant conversion as did Peter and John; but we can give a witness that is comfortable to us and trust the results to the Lord. And who knows, we may win a crippled person at the gate.<sup>77</sup>

### **Every Witness is to Take a Stand for Jesus**

Following the miraculous healing of the crippled man in Acts 3, a crowd gathered. Peter, accompanied by John, preached the gospel to them, and the religious leaders were enraged. The two apostles were later imprisoned because of their witness.

Vines wrote:

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, tactfully yet definitely took his stand for Jesus. His theme was still the same: Jesus is alive. He is the only way of salvation. Verse 12 is one of the greatest verses in the Bible about the saving power of the name of Jesus. How exciting to see Peter lift up the name of Jesus! In spite of the obvious hostility of the surroundings, Peter took his stand.<sup>78</sup>

A witness for Jesus should always realize he is on trial for his faith. As nonbelievers observe the life-style of a Christian, lifestyle evangelism demands that a believer be positioned, similar to Peter and John, so others will respond favorably to Jesus. Vines defines “positioning” as taking a stand decisively and definitely for Jesus.<sup>79</sup>

“Positioning” oneself is a behavior that is common in other areas of life. Christians are of the positioning sort, and most people do so in a myriad of ways. Vines lists some of these ways as he states:

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<sup>77</sup>Vines, *Witnesses Alive*, 17.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>79</sup>Vines, *Acts Alive*, 24.

People are certainly positioning themselves about lesser matters. People loudly proclaim their allegiance to a certain professional football team, whether it be the Dolphins or the Cowboys. It doesn't take long to find out the average person's preference in a political party. People put bumper stickers on their car, signs on their lawn, and even wear funny hats to proclaim their loyalties!<sup>80</sup>

For a believer to be an effective witness, positioning on these lesser things must give way to responsibility to positioning for Christ. This position will be perceived by non-believing observers when coupled with the testimony of a changed life with daily Spirit-led conversation. No one should doubt where a believer stands. "The testimony of your life," Vines says, "prepares the way for the testimony of your lips."<sup>81</sup>

### **Every Christian Is to Engage in the Process of Cultivative Witnessing**

After the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7:60), Luke records that great persecution came against the church in Jerusalem. Acts 8:1 explains that what followed was the scattering of the church throughout Judea and Samaria. Yet, persecution did not weaken the church. It served as a catalyst for its growth, for after being scattered, on their way Christians proclaimed the gospel.

In Acts 8:5-25, Luke writes of the witness of Philip, one of the original deacons of Acts 6, as he shared the gospel in Samaria. Great joy is reported to have come to the city as a result of their acceptance of the gospel. It is through Philip's example that Vines develops a principle of personal evangelism he calls "cultivative witnessing."

He juxtaposes this passage with the account of Jesus' ministry in Samaria in John 4:1-42. Vines then reasons,

Philip was merely one person in a process which had begun in Samaria previously. Philip was faithful to do his part. But he does not get sole credit for the phenomenal results. All the Lord wants us to do is sow the seed. The results are up to God. Thankfully, many who heard in Samaria were receptive to the gospel. Along the way you will have opportunities to sow the seed in hearts that

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Vines, *Witnesses Alive*, 22.

are receptive.<sup>82</sup>

Vines uses Philip's ministry as a paradigm for cultivative witnessing. He explains that not every witnessing encounter will result in immediate conversion: "One person begins the process. It is continued by others. It is completed by still others."<sup>83</sup> This lesson liberates a Christian from feelings of failure when he does not experience a harvest of new believers as a result of his evangelistic effort. He is to be a part of the process of scattering and sowing the seed of the gospel, leaving the results to God.

Vines' teaching of cultivative witnessing has global implications. The geographical outline of Acts begins to unfold in the scattering of Acts 8. The gospel is not bound to Jerusalem. It is now carried to Judea and Samaria. Later in Acts 13 it will be spread to the ends of the earth. Vines explains, "The fire is spreading. The river of God's grace is widening. God's program for evangelizing the world is moving out."<sup>84</sup> A Christian's life is guided by God's divine providence. He sends out his witnesses, who Jesus calls "good seed" (Matt 13:38), into the world to spread the gospel. He scatters the seed in many places in order to bring others to Christ.<sup>85</sup>

### **The Bible is the Indispensable Tool in Personal Evangelism**

Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch offers another example of personal evangelism in Acts 8:26-40. This example follows the previous example of cultivative witnessing, for it offers an account of seed sown on receptive soil. The Holy Spirit led Philip into the path of the eunuch after he had sought God in Jerusalem.

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>83</sup>Vines, *Acts Alive*, 31.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

Furthermore, Philip encounters the eunuch as he read from Isaiah 53. Philip's question asking if the man understood that which he was reading became his opportunity to explain that the passage of Scripture spoke of the gospel about Jesus. Through Philip's obedience to follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit and explanation of the Scriptures, the eunuch trusted Christ as Savior.

Vines uses this text to teach of the need for every believer to follow the Holy Spirit's promptings for opportunities to witness. Yet the main application of the text is that like Philip, a witness must skillfully use the Bible as a tool in personal evangelism. "When the Word is sown in a human heart," Vines says, "Things happen."<sup>86</sup> Luke shows the importance of using the Word of God in witnessing. Vines does not want to diminish the importance of one's personal testimony, but it is paramount that a Christian present God's plan of salvation as it is revealed in the Bible.

### **Sharing One's Personal Testimony is a Vital Part of Witnessing**

In a message entitled, "I've Been Changed," Vines preaches on Paul's personal testimony that he delivers in Jerusalem found in Acts 22:1-21. He states, "One of the greatest evidences for the validity and the reality of the Christian faith is the testimony of a changed life. When a person's life has been changed by the power of Jesus Christ and they testify to that fact it becomes a powerful, powerful tool."<sup>87</sup>

Three places in Acts, Luke gives accounts of Paul's conversion (Acts 9:1-20; 22:1-21; 26:1-32). These accounts verify three essential elements in a personal testimony.

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>87</sup>Jerry Vines, "Powerbook: I've Been Changed" [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Acts 22:1-10 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 21 April 2001; accessed 27 March 2008; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet.

First, Paul shares of his life before Jesus saved him (Acts 9:1-2; 22:3-5; 26:5). Vines points to Paul's example to show that one needs to keep this element brief so as to not brag about one's sinfulness. The second element tells how Paul came to Jesus (Acts 9:3-9; 22:6-10; 26:13). Again, Vines encourages brevity at this junction of his testimony, for "a sinner needs to know what Christ can do for them right now."<sup>88</sup> Finally, Paul shares of the changes that Jesus made in his life (Acts 9:10-20; 22:11-21; 26; 16-23). This stage is the one in which the most time should be allocated in sharing one's testimony.

Every believer should be equipped to share a personal testimony of how God has changed her life. Vines points Christians to contemplate the depth of Paul's desire to be a witness in Romans 9:1-3 and asks, "I wonder if you can say you have been consistent in giving your personal testimony to others?"<sup>89</sup> The more one shares her testimony, the deeper one's burden becomes for nonbelievers to accept Christ.

### **A Believer Must Confront Areas in His Life that Hinder His Witness**

Peter's encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10:1-48 reveals how God works on both sides of a witnessing encounter when a person is saved. Vines describes Centurion as a perfect prospect. Cornelius is a sincere seeker of God who Luke describes as devout, God-fearing, generous, and faithful in prayer (2). Yet, he was not a Christian. Through an angel, God gave him a vision to send for Peter in Joppa.

Vines explains that God had more work to do in the heart of the evangelist than in the heart of an earnest God seeker:

Peter, though a Christian and an apostle, needed to grow in several areas of his life. Many things must change in his heart before he could witness effectively. So often attitudes of the heart, hindrances in your lives, preconceived notions hinder your effectiveness for Jesus. As you shake your cities for Christ, God will have to

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<sup>88</sup>Vines, *Acts Alive*, 47.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.

remove some things from your lives.<sup>90</sup>

For Peter, a hindrance to his witness was his prejudice. Vines also identifies fear and previous embarrassment as hindrances to one's witness.<sup>91</sup> To counter fear, Vines uses Acts 10 to demonstrate how God has already gone before the witness before he engages in evangelism. Furthermore, a witness never fails when he gives a witness for Jesus. God works in many unbelievers' hearts much like he did in the heart of Cornelius. They are ready to receive Christ when a witness shares the gospel. A believer must overcome his hindrances in order to be obedient in personal evangelism.

### **An Effective Witness Shares Christ in a Variety of Circumstances**

Acts 16:9-40 demonstrates that witnessing opportunities are rarely the same. Though the gospel never changes, it must be contextualized to meet the demands of each particular witnessing encounter. There are three different witnessing encounters in this chapter. The first is Lydia. Vines describes her as a "cultured sinner" who was prosperous, well educated, and religious (14-15). When Lydia opened her heart to the Lord, she then responded to Paul's message.<sup>92</sup> Second, while Paul ministered in Philippi, he met a slave girl possessed by a spirit of divination. She followed Paul and declared him to be a servant of God who told of the way to be saved (17). Vines speaks of her as being a "captured sinner" who is set free by the gospel that Paul preached (18).<sup>93</sup>

A final example in the chapter is the conversion of the Philippian jailer who treated Paul and Silas with great hostility (19-40). Vines identifies him as a "calloused

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid, 56.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 57.

sinner.”<sup>94</sup> After an earthquake occurred that loosened the chains of the prisoners, the same jailer became receptive to the gospel. He determined to commit suicide out of fear of the consequences that his prisoners had escaped. Yet, when they remained in their cells, the jailor asked, “What must I do to be saved?” (30). The crisis of the hour prepared him for salvation. In all three circumstances, Paul exemplified what it means for a witness to become all things to all men and contextualize the gospel based on the circumstances of the witnessing opportunity (1 Cor 9:22).

### **Fear is One of Satan’s Most Effective Tools in Silencing a Witness**

Luke gives an account of Paul’s ministry in Corinth in Acts 18:1-17. Vines espouses his belief that Paul experienced “a time of depression and despair at Corinth.”<sup>95</sup> He offers three suggestions to validate his position. First, there was failure. In Athens, recorded in the previous chapter, Paul was insulted (17:18; 32). Second, he felt fatigue. Vines explains: “Physical exhaustion can affect us emotionally and spiritually.” Furthermore, there was frustration. The Jews were mounting their attacks against him. Vines offers, “He hadn’t quit the ministry, but he had probably quit Corinth a thousand times.”<sup>96</sup>

The temptation in this time of discouragement was for Paul to quit being a witness. Vines counsels teachers of his *Acts Alive* curriculum:

The difficulty of building a Christian home in our pagan society takes its toll upon God’s people. This may well be why many of them [your class members] are on the verge of quitting any effort to be a life style witness. All of us have times when life’s burdens and Satan’s attacks seem too much to bear. A lot of us feel like staying, stop the world and let me off! Move over Paul, I’m ready to quit, too.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

God spoke to Paul in his time of need. His message was two-fold. Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking (9). Coupled with this message are the promises of God that helps believers through the difficult times. God promises His presence and protection (10). Moreover, he promises his potential of the many people within Corinth who will be reached with the message of the gospel (10).<sup>98</sup>

### **An Effective Witness Depends on The Power of the Holy Spirit**

Paul's ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-41) reveals what Vines suggests to be "the missing note in the modern church."<sup>99</sup> Living the Spirit-filled life without the Holy Spirit's presence cannot be accomplished. Likewise, Vines teaches, "We cannot witness successfully in our own strength."<sup>100</sup> The believers that Paul met in Ephesus were Christians without spiritual vitality. They did not demonstrate evidence of a Spirit-filled life, so Paul asked them if they received the Holy Spirit when they believed (2). When they responded that they had never heard of the Holy Spirit, Vines explains, "They revealed the missing note in their lives. It is the missing note in so many of today's churches. It is the missing note in the lives of so many Christians."<sup>101</sup>

Sharing Christ without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit is burdensome and frustrating. The difference between success and failure is for a witness to yield to the Spirit and give Him complete control of his life. When a believer's life is marked by purity, prayer, praise, and a passion for souls to come to Christ, the power of the Spirit is

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 62.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 62-64.

<sup>99</sup>Vines, *Witnesses Alive*, 53.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 55.

present and known.<sup>102</sup>

### **A Witness Must Be Faithful in His Methods and Message**

Vines described Paul's meeting with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:17-21 as one of the classic passages in the Bible. He claimed it to be a gold mine of information about how to build a soul-winning church.<sup>103</sup> In it, Paul recounted how he had been with the elders at all seasons serving the Lord (18-19). He is the picture of faithfulness. Likewise, Vines beckons all witnesses to demonstrate similar faithfulness. All Christians are called to do as God commands and remain faithful to death (Rev 2:10). In particular, believers are called to a life of continuous life-style witnessing.<sup>104</sup>

Vines ascribes to a particular method of witnessing. In addition to public times in which the gospel is preached, Paul led people in house-to-house visitation (Acts 20:20). Vines explains: "We see that a church visitation program is not something we thought up. It is a sound principle of soul-winning which is given to us in the New Testament."<sup>105</sup> A visit in an unbeliever's home is not enough, because lifestyle witnessing declares that a witness must share a specific message. The witness' main objective was to share the gospel and call unsaved persons to repentance and faith (21).<sup>106</sup> When a lost person repents of his sins and believes in Jesus as his Savior, this commitment of one's life leads to salvation.

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 60.

### **A Believer Must Witness to Unreceptive Persons and Cultivate Them for Christ**

Nearing the end of Acts, Luke writes of Paul's encounters with Felix and Agrippa. Both were prosperous, powerful, and wicked. In 24:22-27 Paul strikes at the heart of the matter with Felix and Drusilla. He spoke of righteousness, temperance, and the coming judgment with them and brought them "face to face with Jesus."<sup>107</sup> What Vines found striking in Paul's witness on this occasion was that he refused to be intimidated. The power and wealth of these two unbelievers did not affect his testimony. He viewed them as two for whom Christ died, so he overcame his fears and shared the gospel. Though Felix trembled when he contemplated the gospel, he never trusted Christ. Felix's unbelief was not Paul's failure, however, for as Vines explains, "We never fail when we are a faithful witness. We merely seek to witness in the power of the Holy Spirit and leave the results to God."<sup>108</sup>

Agrippa's response to the gospel was similar to Felix. He is almost persuaded in 26:24-32, yet turned away from Christ. Vines acknowledges:

Some of the most difficult people with whom we deal are those who agree with everything we say, admit they need Jesus, affirm that they believe Jesus died on the cross for their sins, yet will not give themselves to Christ. Maybe they are not really serious about it. Some past experiences may hinder their desire to give themselves to Christ.<sup>109</sup>

When faced with this difficult witnessing situation, Vines advises believers to follow Paul's example. Through his winsome gospel presentation, he left the door open for further conversations. Vines explains: "Most people do not come to Christ the first time He is presented to them. Usually, careful cultivation and earnest prayer are

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 62.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 63.

needed.”<sup>110</sup> Paul presented the gospel tactfully and lovingly. All Christians are called to do likewise.

### **Secondary Applications for Personal Evangelism**

In Vines’ hermeneutical method, preliminary applications are given greater importance than the context-driven nuances of secondary application. Nevertheless, secondary applications are significant, especially in regard to personal evangelism, for they guide the particular methods that a church member will employ as he engages in continual life-style witnessing. These applications change depending on one’s ministry setting. The numerical growth that Vines experienced attests to their effectiveness in Vines’ particular context. In *Witnesses Alive*, he writes:

When Dr. Homer Lindsay, Jr. came to be pastor of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, in 1969, the church had 3,522 members. Today, that church has more than 20,000 members. Sunday School averaged 1,324 in 1969; today it averages more than 7,000. In the past 11 years more than 10,000 people have been baptized in the church.<sup>111</sup>

First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida was especially committed to reaching their community through evangelism. The church disciplined its people to make personal prayer lists for the unsaved, use marked New Testaments to share their faith, share an effective testimony, and participate in home visitation ministry.

### **Personal Prayer Lists**

Preparation for witnessing requires a daily time in prayer. To aid a person in developing this discipline, Vines encouraged his congregation to prepare a prayer list. Vines asserted this prayer list to be a secondary application of Acts 1:14. On this list, a person would place the names of unsaved friends, family members, business associates,

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 10.

or others who she wanted to become a Christian. She would list the date she would begin to pray for the individual, and then list the date the person became a Christian. Vines believed this list to be invaluable to the person utilizing it, because it helped her keep specific people before the Lord daily. Furthermore, it helped increase a person's burden for the lost.<sup>112</sup>

### **Marked New Testaments**

A way to articulate Vines' preliminary application of Acts 8:26-40 is that the Bible is an indispensable tool in witnessing. The secondary application of this principle is that his congregation was encouraged to use marked New Testaments in their personal evangelism encounters. There were two plans that Vines taught his congregation to use in *Acts Alive*. First, he taught them to share the gospel by highlighting verses in the book of Romans. The first passage is Romans 3:23 which explains an unbeliever's lostness. The second reference is Romans 6:23 to explain the penalty of sin. Romans 5:8 follows so the lost individual knows of the price of redemption. Romans 10:9-10 then calls for a response. Romans 8:38-39 explains the security of a believer. The gospel presentation concludes with Romans 12:1-2 and the explanation of the nature of a life of obedience. With each reference, the class member was instructed to note the page number of the particular verse and write in the aforementioned order on the front page flyleaf of his Bible.<sup>113</sup>

Vines also taught the same method of witnessing and notation in how to use the Gospel of John to share Christ. John 1:14 explains the revelation of God in Christ. John 3:3 discusses one's need for Jesus. John 3:16 calls a nonbeliever to respond to the

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>113</sup>Vines, *Acts Alive*, 41.

gospel. John 3:36 expresses the consequences of sin. John 10:28 explains the security that is found in Christ. John 11:25 is a passage of hope.<sup>114</sup>

### **Two-Minute Testimony**

Vines applied Acts 9:1-20; 22:1-21; 26:1-32 to teach how to share one's testimony in his continual lifestyle witnessing. The guide he took from these texts was three fold. First, one must share what life was like before becoming a Christian. Second, a good testimony explains how one received Christ as Savior. Third, it mentions the difference that Jesus has made in the witness' life since being saved.

Vines' secondary application of this application was the teaching of a two-minute testimony. It urged brevity and simplicity, for "a lengthy, wordy, involved account can hinder its presentation." He advised a person not to dwell on one's past life, for if not careful, she might come across as bragging to the depth of her sinfulness. Furthermore, he discouraged a person from dwelling too long on the event of his conversion, because a sinner needs to know what Christ can do for them now. He taught his church members to give thirty seconds to sharing their life before Christ. Next, he instructed them to give the same time to sharing their conversion experience. Finally he encouraged them to allocate a full minute to share the difference that Christ had made in their lives.<sup>115</sup>

### **Home Visitation Teams**

A preliminary application of Acts 20:20 is the method of door to door visitation. Vines asserts this strategy to be the way an entire city can be evangelized. The specifics of how a church engages in this method move the preacher to secondary

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<sup>114</sup>Ibid.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 47.

application. Vines organized his visitation ministry through the Sunday School. Each class had visitation teams that went into homes seeking to win people to Christ on a weekly basis.<sup>116</sup>

Vines expected class leaders to regularly visit in the homes of the church's prospects. He acknowledges the pastor should lead by example in his visitation for the church. In the same way, a class leader should lead the way for his Sunday School class. It is important for a teacher to teach well, much like it is important for a pastor to preach well. Still, the needs of people will be discovered through home visitation. Homes are "where folks are hurting, where opportunities are everywhere to win others to Christ."<sup>117</sup> Through encouragement and leading by example, a teacher can see his class attendance double and reach many for Jesus, especially "if you could get all of your class members actively involved in weekly visitation."<sup>118</sup>

### **Evaluation**

This chapter discusses the hermeneutical method that Vines employs in his teaching and preaching on personal evangelism through the book of Acts. Vines' hermeneutical method is reproducible. It eliminates subjectivity from one's interpretation of a text and has the authorial intent of a passage as its goal. It culminates in the presentation of timeless truths related to personal evangelism he calls "preliminary applications." The "secondary applications" that are detailed above are specific to the context of Vines' ministry at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, yet they were

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 76.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

effective implementations of the timeless principles from Acts and are worthy of consideration by anyone ministering in a similar ministry setting.<sup>119</sup>

An evaluation of Vines' aforementioned approach hinges upon the correctness of his hermeneutic. Overall, his treatment of Acts is on target. Acts is a book about witnessing. The verse that outlines its content is a Great Commission text (Acts 1:8). While it describes the first days in the life of the early church, it also prescribes evangelistic practices that believers of all ages are commanded to follow. Thus, if this book's thirty-nine uses of the word "witness" repeatedly call Christians to live in the power of the Holy Spirit as they maintain a lifestyle of continuous witnessing; and if Vines' principlization of Acts is an acceptable method to arrive at timeless truths pertaining to how that witness is accomplished, then Acts should be at the foundation of a pastor's teaching, preaching, and equipping his congregation to do the work of a personal evangelist.

Vines' treatment of Acts places future expositors on the tracks of utilizing Acts in this way. It is an example of Daniel M. Doriani's view that meaning should not be distinguished *from* application. Application *is* meaning.<sup>120</sup> Much of the meaning contained in Acts pertains to personal evangelism, and in this arena Vines' contribution is two-fold. It unveils the meaning, implications, and applications he believes the Holy Spirit has revealed to him through his extensive work in the book. Also, it leaves the expositor a hermeneutical method that can be employed for further discovery.

A weakness of Vines' hermeneutic is his explanation of historical books and

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<sup>119</sup>When I mention the secondary applications are worthy of consideration in similar ministry settings to First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, I am discussing the surrounding setting of the church rather than the setting of the church itself. Very few church settings would be comparable to the 30,000 member congregation of First Baptist.

<sup>120</sup>Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R, 2001), 19-22.

doctrinal books of the New Testament. Though Acts is a book of historical narrative, he separates it from other books because of its transitional dispensation. While never declares it to be a non-doctrinal book, but he does ascribe to the appropriateness of looking to the doctrinal books that follow Acts to confirm its doctrine.<sup>121</sup> Anyone who advocates this view will struggle in keeping these lines of the theological usability of New Testament books clear. He gives explanation for how to interpret Acts through looking to the books that follow it in the canon, but he does not explain the role of the Gospels in determining his theology for Acts. The Gospels are books, along with Acts, that Vines claims include historical narrative literature,<sup>122</sup> but they are not books written in Vines' understanding of the same transitional dispensation as Acts. That leads to one of two conclusions. Either these books do help to determine orthodox theology that can be confirmed in Acts, or, they are books that must be subjected to other doctrinal books much like Acts.

The latter option cannot hold true, if not for any other basis than the doctrine found in the Great Commission passages of the New Testament. The five passages considered to be the Great Commission passages are found in the historical narrative books of the Gospels and Acts (cf. Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-48;

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<sup>121</sup>Vines, *Spirit Life*, 170. Rainer deals with this matter by steering away from the debate as to how one handles the normative versus the exception matters in Acts. He states: "Much debate has transpired in recent years over certain events in the Book of Acts. Is the tongues-speaking miracle of Pentecost an event for Christians to expect today? Should the 'signs and wonders' prevalent in Acts accompany our modern-day evangelistic efforts? Is Christian initiation a two-stage event, with conversion and water baptism followed by the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Rather than elucidate the arguments for and against such phenomena as being normative for today, it is of greater value to focus on the areas of *agreement* which were integral to the evangelism and church growth of the early church." This approach is helpful when writing a theological article, but it does little to aid a pastor who is committed to preaching the entirety of Acts as he handles the normative versus exception issues in the book. (Thom Rainer, "Church Growth and Evangelism in the Book of Acts," 59-60).

<sup>122</sup>Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 100.

John 20:21-23; Acts 1:7-8).<sup>123</sup> These verses teach theology that is foundational to evangelism and missions. If taken out of play, then texts necessary for a robust, biblical theology for missions and evangelism would be sorely neglected. This kind of approach to hermeneutics would lead to the very problem faced by William Carey when he confronted his non-missions minded hyper-Calvinistic brethren for restricting the Great Commission to the Apostles and removing from it contemporary application.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, from where would the theology from Acts 1:8 be obtained?

The Gospels must weigh in to the theology found in the book of Acts. It would be unreasonable to do otherwise, especially when one considers that Luke and Acts share the same biblical author. When studying Vines' preaching, he treats all of the books of the New Testament as doctrinal books while asserting that a theological position cannot be supported by Acts alone. Thus, a sensible solution to this confusion is for Vines to consider adjusting his terminology. Since Acts is of a transitional dispensation, it ought to be set apart from the rest of the New Testament books. But then, to protect one's prescriptive hermeneutic from becoming dismantled by narrative accounts that go against New Testament patterns, hold to the view that any and all doctrine in Acts must be affirmed by the books found before and after it in the canon.

A second critique of Vines' treatment of Acts is its omission of explicit application of the Great Commission and missions (Acts 1:8). The overarching application of the book is personal evangelism for Vines. When explaining the advancement of Christian witness from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, he does not

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<sup>123</sup>T. J. Betts, "The Great Commission in the Old Testament," in *The Challenge of the Great Commission: Essays on God's Mandate for the Local Church*, ed. Chuck Lawless and Thom S. Rainer (Nashville: Pinnacle, 2005), 17.

<sup>124</sup>Yarnell, "The Heart of a Baptist," 2.

explicitly apply this text to a strategy for worldwide missions. This exclusion is a weakness in Vines' teaching and preaching.

Though this explicit application is not made in his treatment of the book, his teaching clearly implies its missional application. The timeless truths referred to as preliminary applications presented in this chapter are not confined to specific cultural or historical contexts. They transcend those particular restrictions and should be treated as imperatives for evangelism wherever a believer traverses. Thus, when a missionary is called to a distant place of service, the instructions for evangelism in Acts can be used to chart the course for his evangelistic endeavors. A new believer in an unreached people group can apply Acts to reach his household and community for Christ. Simultaneously, a desire should be fostered to reach nonbelievers living in the uttermost parts of the world. These themes are implied in Vines' writing and preaching, but they are not emphasized to adequately convey the recurring theme of missions in Acts. Nevertheless, his preliminary applications can and should be utilized in any mission field.

### **Conclusion**

In my estimation, Vines' hermeneutical method for the book of Acts is his greatest contribution to evangelism. It offers timeless principles for personal evangelism that God has ordained for the church, regardless of the world's changing tides of philosophical trends. It demands that the preacher self-apply what he preaches and teaches to his own life, thus making him an exemplary personal evangelist. It is undergirded by reproducible principles that promise further insight into biblical, Spirit-led evangelism.

This chapter concludes my support for the thesis of this dissertation that Vines' preaching is a model of evangelistic focus. The next chapter will offer my conclusions. It describes the qualities of his ministry worth emulating and other issues of concern.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### **Introduction**

On 6 December 2002, *Baptist Press* ran an article written by James A. Smith, Sr., entitled, “SBC seminary presidents honor Jerry Vines’ pastoral example.” It recounted the presentation of recognition rendered to Vines by R. Albert Mohler, Jr. on behalf of the presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention seminaries and reads:

Praising him as an example ‘to the pastors of the Southern Baptist Convention,’ the presidents of the six Southern Baptist seminaries presented a ‘Certificate of Honor’ to Jerry Vines Nov. 24 during the morning worship service at First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla.

Speaking on behalf of the seminaries’ chief executives as chairman of the Council of Seminary Presidents, R. Albert Mohler Jr. said, “When we think about the great First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., we think of a legacy of ministry,” citing pastor Vines and his predecessors: Homer Lindsay Sr. and Homer Lindsay Jr. “If we could communicate one thing from our hearts to you today, it would be a sense of gratitude for what you as a congregation represent to the world, this community and our convention,” Mohler said. “And if we could articulate one aspiration for the thousands of students at our seminaries, it would be that they would go out to minister in the legacy and following the example of Dr. Lindsey and Dr. Lindsey [sic] and Dr. Vines. When you think of what the Lord has done in this place, our prayer is that we could see churches like this built across America.”

“Dr. Jerry Vines, your dear pastor, is such an example to the pastors of the Southern Baptist Convention, but you as a congregation do what virtually no other congregation in America does, and that is you share your ministry with churches and pastors all over the nation,” Mohler continued.

“This certificate of honor recognized Vines’ example as a Christian pastor, evangelist, preacher, friend to pastors and denominational leader.”<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation contends that Vines is worthy of such commendation. The more I have read Vines’ letters, listened to his sermons, interviewed him on specific matters of theology, and pondered his practice of ministry, the greater my admiration for him has

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<sup>1</sup>James A. Smith, Sr., “SBC Seminary Presidents Honor Jerry Vines’ Pastoral Example,” *The Baptist Press* (6 December 2002) [on-line]; accessed 23 November 2010; available from <http://www.bpnews.net/printerfriendly.asp?ID=14806>; Internet.

grown. Yet, the credibility of this work of research demands that I reveal his weaknesses. In the spirit of Lyle Dorsett in his treatment of D. L. Moody: “To make any attempt to cover them over [his weaknesses] is to distort the man and render him unbelievable.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus, I will bring this dissertation to a close by discussing the strengths and weaknesses of Vines’ life and ministry. In so doing, it will become apparent that Vines is, indeed, a model of evangelistic focus. As is true of any human model, there is perhaps as much gain in learning from him what to emulate as well as the aspects of his ministry that one should seek to improve.

### **Qualities Worthy of Emulation**

Throughout Vines’ career of ministry, there are perceivable qualities that contributed to his evangelistic focus. Having noted in chapter one the dearth of evangelistic fruitfulness in the present milieu, any pastor desiring to fulfill a life calling of persistent evangelistic commitment should find these qualities to be worthy of consideration.

### **A Commitment to the Inerrancy of Scripture**

Early in his ministry, Vines garnered the reputation of being a champion of the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. He views one’s beliefs about the Bible crucial to the work of evangelism, because “the Bible is primarily intended to bring people to salvation.” In the pamphlet form of *A Baptist and his Bible*, Vines acknowledges that Baptists get concerned when there is any hint of attack upon the Bible. He asserts:

We get upset when there is any undermining of its authority, questioning of its reliability, or denying of its accuracy. The Book has to do with man’s eternal destiny. To attack the Bible is like tampering with medicine for a sick man; like poisoning the bread of a hungry man...How can anyone say we must trust our soul to Christ for eternity, then turn around and try to obliterate the very document which

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<sup>2</sup>Lyle Dorsett, *A Passion for Souls* (Moody Press: Chicago, 1997), 25.

tells us about him? We honor the book and earnestly contend for it because we know what it is intended to do.<sup>3</sup>

Vines views the Bible as being the authoritative Word of God. God's intention in giving it to humanity is to bring people to salvation. The scientific, historical, and prophetic truths of the Bible must be trustworthy, for if the Bible errs in any point, it cannot be trusted in matters of soteriology.<sup>4</sup>

### **A Commitment to Expository Preaching**

Vines' respect for the Bible found expression in his approach to preaching. It would be erroneous to delineate Vines' commitment to evangelism from expository preaching. From an early age, he began sharing the gospel through personal evangelism. As his ministry matured, his evangelistic zeal was bolstered, especially after he embraced an expository preaching method. It is not coincidental that the evangelistic fruitfulness of his ministry, measured by annual baptisms, increased when he made a full commitment to expository preaching. I am persuaded that this commitment to expository preaching is largely responsible for being the fuel for his persistent evangelistic zeal.<sup>5</sup>

Vines' own admissions of the personal study disciplines invoked by his expository method affirm this correlation. When writing of his weekly sermon preparation, he states:

I have been studying in the mornings for most of the years of my ministry. The mornings seem to be the best time for me. I begin my study time around 6:00 a.m., including my daily devotional time. I normally study until 11:00 a.m., I do this five

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<sup>3</sup>Jerry Vines, *A Baptist and His Bible* (Jacksonville, FL: n.p., 1988), 14.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>I base this assertion on the baptism statistics of West Rome Baptist Church during Vines' first of two tenures as pastor. Timothy Hight makes a similar conclusion when he claims that his consistent expository preaching "was an influential factor in the growth of the West Rome Baptist Church." In Timothy A. Hight, "A Comparative Homiletical Analysis of Selected Southern Baptist Convention Presidents From 1979 Through 1989" (Th.D. diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991), 37.

mornings each week.<sup>6</sup>

Each day, Vines engages in careful study of Scripture. He begins his study with forty five minutes of devotional Bible reading and prayer. He then proceeds to his in-depth study of the Scriptures. This study yields the fruit of good preaching, but it also has a personal effect on Vines as a preacher. He affirms that “by careful, exegetical study through books of the Bible in preparation for sermons the preacher can come to master his Bible.”<sup>7</sup> Striving for this mastery of the full counsel of God’s Word leads him to daily grapple with his irresistible logic of the Bible.<sup>8</sup> That logic demands his prayerfulness and action, thus leading him to develop his tried and tested approach to continual lifestyle witnessing.

For Vines, expository preaching not only had benefits for him, the preacher, but also obvious advantages for his congregation. He transfers the Bible’s irresistible logic from the pulpit to the pew as his expository preaching encourages his people to become students of the Word themselves.<sup>9</sup> His pastoral preaching models for his congregation how they can join him in a weekly, systematical study of the Bible. In so doing, he attests to its way of broadening people’s horizons. In *A Practical Guide*, Vines defines these expanded horizons as being “new heights of Bible knowledge and Christian experience,” and I am confident that he would affirm that their newfound vision of “a world of Christian experience that they never dreamed possible” correctly focuses on

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<sup>6</sup>Jerry Vines, *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 53.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 20. Vines does not make the direct correlation of the benefits of expository preaching to evangelistic effectiveness in the footnoted pages of *A Practical Guide* of this section. Yet, after assessing the evangelistic fruitfulness of his churches, I believe this correlation to possess merit.

<sup>8</sup>For a discussion of Vines’ “irresistible logic of the Bible,” refer to page 67.

<sup>9</sup>Vines, *A Practical Guide*, 23.

their role in fulfilling the Great Commission (Acts 1:8).<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, as Vines' congregants persisted in becoming students of the Bible and having their spiritual horizons expanded, another benefit of his pastoral expository preaching was their increased maturation. Spiritual immaturity lies at the heart of evangelistic ineffectiveness. Vines asserts that "many a pastor started with a very immature congregation, began preaching through books of the Bible, and so helped foster spirituality. As both pastor and people mature in the Lord, they are able to do the work of the Lord together in a more harmonious and effective fashion."<sup>11</sup> Expository preaching encourages a church to move beyond its immaturity. It allows a congregation to have its areas of weakness exposed. When that weakness involves a lack of evangelistic fervor, expository preaching can be a tool that God uses to help to overcome it.

Vines cements his ministry in his belief that the godly life of a preacher is imperative to impactful, Spirit-led ministry. He claims the silent sermon of a godly life is as important as any verbal sermon a preacher proclaims.<sup>12</sup> His commitment to expository preaching impacts his life so much that his silent sermons are on par with his verbal ones. He not only preaches the silent sermon of a life of integrity, but also one of exemplary evangelistic commitment. His example, coupled with his proclamation, equipped the congregations he pastored to do likewise.

## **Humility**

A quality that makes Vines a focused evangelist and pastoral leader is his humility. Replete throughout his biography are occasions that he transparently admitted his limitations. As a junior in high school, he was constrained by such a high degree of

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 30.

timidity that he admitted to not possessing the natural abilities expected of a preacher. At first, his pastor was reluctant to encourage him when he sensed a call to the ministry due to this bashfulness. It also became a matter he had to overcome when he engaged in opportunities to witness.

His humility is perceived in a myriad of other ways. When in college, he acknowledged the scholarliness of his professors in comparison to himself. After attempting to preach his first expository series through the book of Romans in his first pastorate, his perceived failure led to what he considered “the sixteen most miserable weeks of my life.”<sup>13</sup> Rather than persevere in accordance with his conviction for expository preaching, his sense of failure led him to abandon its practice for ten years, opting instead for a topical approach to preaching that he admits “is one of the poorest ways to preach.”<sup>14</sup> He admitted the reason he pastored several churches prior to First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida had as much to do with his maturation process as a minister as anything else.<sup>15</sup> He credits Homer Lindsay, Jr. as being the greatest church growth man he had ever known with little regard for his own recognition.<sup>16</sup> In my first interview with him, without being prompted, he admitted to his dissatisfaction with his evangelistic effort since retirement.<sup>17</sup> My most recent encounter with his humble spirit occurred in an email interview with him. While explaining his striving for a biblical

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Duduit, *Preaching with Power: Dynamic Insights from Twenty Top Pastors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 198.

<sup>14</sup> Vines, *A Practical Guide*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Jerry Vines, “Mullins Lecture Luncheon,” Recorded in Heritage Hall, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY 21 March 2007 during the Mullins Lectures, [CD].

<sup>16</sup> Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 17 August 2006.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

theology, he acknowledged times, in his human frailty, that he does not hit his mark of theological precision.<sup>18</sup> These examples demonstrate the humility of Vines that I found easily perceivable in my personal interviews with him.

Humble servitude is a quality God uses to accomplish great things for His glory. Moses was the leader God chose to lead the Israelites in the days of the Exodus. He was credited as being more humble than any man on the face of the earth (Num 12:3). When a leader humbles himself and admits to his weaknesses, he is a person positioned to be used mightily by the Lord. Vines placed himself in this position. Thus, God uses his preaching ministry as a model of evangelistic focus.

### **Boldness**

Just as Vines implored his congregation to follow the example of Peter and John to boldly witness for Christ (Acts 4:19-20), Vines has been willing to stand for Christ. Two notable examples of his boldness occurred on a national stage. When President George H.W. Bush made the unprecedented decision to invite an openly homosexual group to the White House, personal conviction drove Vines to withdraw the invitation to speak at the Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting.<sup>19</sup> Also, when the national media pressured him to apologize for his comments exposing the historical record of Muhammad's gross indiscretions, his conviction of the truthfulness of his comments led him to stand on his statements.<sup>20</sup>

Another example of Vines' boldness was displayed in his denominational

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<sup>18</sup>Jerry Vines, email interview by author, 5 October 2010.

<sup>19</sup>Greg Warner, "President Bush Declines Invitation to Speak at SBC," *Baptist Press* 18 May 1990, 1.

<sup>20</sup>Jerry Vines, as quoted by staff and wire reporters, "Vines Calls Founder of Islam a 'Demon-Possessed Pedophile,'" *Biblical Recorder* (14 June 2002) [on-line]; accessed 10 November 2010; available from [http://www.biblicalrecorder.org/content/news/2002/6\\_14\\_2002/ne140602vines.shtml](http://www.biblicalrecorder.org/content/news/2002/6_14_2002/ne140602vines.shtml); Internet.

leadership. He entered into the movement that would later be called the Conservative Resurgence before it had fully materialized. He believed his position would potentially lead to “denominational suicide,” but his convictions led him to commit to the task of turning the Convention toward conservatism.<sup>21</sup> His efforts proved successful, and the Convention returned to its biblical foundation.

A preacher who desires for his ministry to be marked with evangelistic focus must demonstrate this same boldness. Denominational political concerns must be subservient to biblical conviction. Cultural norms must go unheeded when they make it difficult for an expositor to affirm the exclusivity of Christ. These same forces are often responsible for leveling the charge of bigotry against biblically centered ministers who unapologetically refer to homosexuality as a sin. An effective evangelistic leader cannot be dissuaded by these challenges. He must always be winsome in his presentation of the truth, yet uncompromising when biblical principle is at stake.

### **Theological Integrity**

Closely related to his quality of boldness is the theological conviction that guides Vines’ life. As a student at Mercer, he was repeatedly confronted with liberal theology. Though his professors argued against the authority of the Bible, Vines made a decision to accept the Bible by faith and faithfully preach its content. His seminary days in New Orleans were marked by an education that he described as being much more conservative and satisfying in comparison to the tutelage he received from Mercer. Through his pondering over the doctrines that gave foundation to his ministry, Vines settled on the positions he found to be biblically centered and evangelistically motivating.

Most recently, it is Vines’ response against Calvinism that has garnered considerable attention and discussion. Yet, though it might be assumed his doctrinal

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<sup>21</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 25 August 2009.

positions are a reaction to the recent rise of Calvinism within the Southern Baptist Convention, his most prominent arguments are consistent with positions he has maintained for quite some time. For instance, his exposition of John 3:16 found at the beginning of *Whosoever Will* is strikingly similar to a sermon he preached in the chapel at Southern Seminary in 1997, an exposition of the same text, entitled, “Seminary in a Nutshell.”<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, while at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1995, Vines articulated a position of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility synonymous with the position he opines today. He posed a question to the student body, “Are you a Calvinist, or are you an Arminian?” He followed with an answer:

If you are either, you are a religious humanist because that is a man-centered theology instead of a God-centered theology. I could care less what Calvin believed and I could care less what Arminius believed—I want to know what the revealed Word of God has to say. . . .The Bible teaches divine sovereignty. The Bible teaches human responsibility. I don’t worry about reconciling them. I just preach them and God takes care of the reconciliation. There is a lost and dying world out there and it is not impressed with such theological discussions.<sup>23</sup>

Through the breadth of Vines’ years of ministry, his theological positions remained consistent. Especially during the Conservative Resurgence, he often espoused his theological views when they were not the most popular positions. This unwavering quality allowed him to be an anchor for the Resurgence. It also fastened his ministry to a biblical approach to evangelism that guarded his methodology from contradicting sound

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<sup>22</sup>Jerry Vines, “Sermon on John 3:16,” in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: Broad and Holman Academic, 2010), 13-28. This sermon is similar to Jerry Vines, “Seminary in a Nutshell,” audio recorded message of an exposition of John 3:16 delivered at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary on 11 September 1997; audiocassette.

<sup>23</sup>Dwayne Hastings, “Calvinism Versus Arminianism is Empty Argument, Vines Says,” *Baptist Press* (23 August 1995), 3.

doctrine.<sup>24</sup> When he matched doctrinal conviction with the humility to allow Scripture to correct his theology, the result formed a doctrinal foundation for his evangelistic focus.

### **Pursuit of a Biblical Theology**

The most prominent aspect of Vines' theological method is his pursuit of a biblical theology.<sup>25</sup> There was purity to his endeavor, for his goal was to hold to doctrinal positions that said nothing more or less than what the Scriptures said. His pursuit sought theological precision. The following benefits came from his adherence to his theological method. First, his theology drew its focus from the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). The Great Commission directed his pastoral leadership energies to reaching the lost and discipling the saved. Second, he fully embraced the *Baptist Faith and Message*.<sup>26</sup> He not only held to the tenants of the BF&M, he served on the committee that wrote the most recent revision of them. Third, his theology enabled him to seek a healthy theological balance that strove to not overemphasize one particular doctrine at the expense of another. Fourth, his aversion to labels was aimed at protecting his beliefs from associations that are assumed with a particular label. He viewed this potential controversy as nothing but a distraction that threatened his main mission of fulfilling the Great Commission.

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<sup>24</sup>I did not footnote specific examples of these theological views, largely because I have treated them extensively in chapters two and three. Particularly, chapter two discusses the way Vines used a plea for evangelistic commitment in a corrective fashion throughout his terms as Convention President. The inerrancy of Scripture is the central doctrine that he unapologetically espoused during the Conservative Resurgence. He still holds to this doctrine unswervingly today.

<sup>25</sup>As is discussed in chapter 3, what Vines calls, "biblical theology," differs from the commonly accepted definition of the term. Refer back to page 63 for a more thorough explanation of Vines' use of the term.

<sup>26</sup>"The Baptist Faith and Message" [on-line]; accessed 3 December 2010; available from <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp>; Internet.

### **A Commitment to Personal Evangelism**

Regardless of the demands of his preaching calendar or the demanding responsibilities of denominational leadership, Vines maintained his commitment to weekly, personal evangelism. He led the weekly visitation ministry of the churches that he pastored. This weekly appointment helped him maintain a structured commitment to share his faith. Moreover, he prayed for daily opportunities to share his faith, and often God would answer his prayer as Vines would lead someone to Christ.<sup>27</sup> When this consistent commitment was coupled with his expository preaching, the results led to outstanding evangelistic focus.

In the midst of his service during the Conservative Resurgence, Vines continued to maintain his commitment to personal evangelism. Calvin Carr recounts how Vines would continue his weekly visitation even while serving as Convention president.<sup>28</sup> Admittedly, there were schedule challenges to maintaining his commitment to personal evangelism. However, whenever Vines was in town, he would allow only his family responsibilities to alter his outreach efforts. Even when family responsibilities conflicted with his visitation plan, he usually found a way to rework his schedule so that he could fulfill his commitment to personal witnessing.<sup>29</sup> To state it plainly, he not only instructed his church to do the work of evangelism, he led them in that work.

Perhaps his finest example of evangelistic fidelity occurred at the time of his retirement. Janet Vines shared an encounter that both she and Vines had with a neighbor the day they left Jacksonville, Florida to relocate to Canton, Georgia. Though the neighbor's husband was a Christian, she had never professed Christ. She paid her beloved neighbors a parting visit, and while doing so, she prayed to receive Christ. After

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<sup>27</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 25 August 2009.

<sup>28</sup>Calvin Carr, telephone interview by author, 14 April 2010.

<sup>29</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 25 August 2009.

observing her neighbors for years, the consistency of their life and witness became the instrument that God used to lead her to saving faith.<sup>30</sup>

### **Work Ethic**

During his fifty years of pastoral ministry, Vines persistently held to a rigorous weekly work schedule. His personal discipline was fostered through his demanding seminary schedule. After studying and traveling throughout the week, Vines spent a morning with his family. He then began a demanding pace of visitation that entailed an average of thirty visits over the weekend. After preaching morning and evening Sunday messages, he traveled to New Orleans and repeated the same schedule. He persisted in this schedule throughout his seminary pastorate in Cedartown, Georgia.<sup>31</sup>

His aforementioned morning schedule of devotion, prayer, and Bible study allotted him twenty-five hours per week of sermon preparation. Vines then used the afternoon hours for the administrative and pastoral care needs of the church. He reserved the evenings for his family as often as possible.

In *A Practical Guide*, Vines describes how he disciplined his time:

For many years I have been arranging my weekly morning study times in a very definite manner. On Monday morning I prepare a half sheet of paper divided into the days of the week. On the bottom of the page I put down what my study requirements are for the week. For instance, for the week I may have a Sunday morning and Sunday evening message to prepare. In addition to this, I may need to prepare a message to be delivered in an outside speaking engagement. Also, I may be called upon to preach at some function in our church besides our normal services. Each of these preaching opportunities is put down. Then, I arrange on a daily basis the time I will spend on each preparation. This does not mean I will necessarily follow to the minute the schedule I have prepared. I am simply preparing some kind of time structure for each day.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Janet Vines, personal interview by author, 25 August 2009.

<sup>31</sup>Emir Caner and Ergun Caner, *The Sacred Trust: Sketches of the Southern Baptist Convention Presidents* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 178.

<sup>32</sup>Vines, *A Practical Guide*, 51-52.

Vines' work weeks are accurately described as being rigorous and structured. These habits assured him the time necessary to remain committed to expository preaching. Additionally, they afforded him the time to tend to the pastoral and administrative responsibilities of being a pastor. Most importantly, a structured, well planned week protected his time with his family. Through maintaining this weekly schedule, he was able to allocate suitable time for personal evangelism.

### **Preaching with an Evangelistic Appeal**

Vines' preaching ministry is best described as expository preaching with an evangelistic appeal. He carried the belief throughout his pastoral ministry that Bible preaching always points to evangelism. While he finds that most of the Bible is written to believers, the irresistible logic of the Bible called for an appeal for lost persons to trust Christ as Savior.

The primary way Vines bridges a sermon's content from the subject matter of the message's text to the evangelistic appeal was through what he coins the sermon's "evangelistic twist." The twist is placed at the end of his sermon. Rather than twist the text, his goal was to twist the sermon so it smoothly transitioned into a plea for the unsaved in his audience to receive Christ. As a preacher, Vines sees parallel in his work as an expositor and that of a lawyer. He considered himself a lawyer, pleading the Lord's cause. His preaching is intended to do more than convey information. His messages call for a verdict.<sup>33</sup> The verdict he seeks in the lives of the unsaved is their saving faith.

### **Equipping the Congregation for Evangelism**

Vines' ministry reflects his effort to equip the church to do the work of the ministry (Eph 4:12). In particular, he equipped it to do the work of evangelism. His Sunday School literature entitled *Acts Alive* germinates from his commitment to lead his

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 146.

church members to participate in community outreach. The primary vehicle through which he accomplished this equipping was through the church's Sunday School. In an interview with me, he explained:

We did our evangelism training in Sunday School. Instead of doing a four night seminar on it, we did it in our Sunday School, so that instead of having just one fifth of your people there, you get them all. We did our training, and then all our visitation, our soul winning visitation, through the Sunday prospect system. Everything was set up in our Sunday School classes.<sup>34</sup>

When First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida peaked in its evangelistic fruitfulness, the church reported an average of 1,000 Sunday School members participating in weekly visitation.<sup>35</sup> This ministry thrived because the church possessed what Vines called "soul consciousness."<sup>36</sup> They had a heart to reach the lost and firmly believed the most important task for a believer to accomplish is to share the gospel with another person. Thus, they participated in evangelism training and a significant number of their membership took the opportunity through weekly visitation to put their witnessing training to regular use.

### **Commitment to Early Church Evangelism**

The emphasis that Vines places on the book of Acts and its instruction for personal evangelism reveals that he looks to the early church as his guide in how to lead a church to grow. The content of Acts was a part of his theological underpinnings for the church. In Acts, he traces his view of the two purposes of a church being evangelism and discipleship. His view of the Great Commission did distinguish between these two pursuits more than the text allows. The missionary emphasis of the book was a

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<sup>34</sup>Jerry Vines, interview by author, 17 August 2006.

<sup>35</sup> Timothy A. Hight, "A Comparative Homiletical Analysis of Selected Southern Baptist Convention Presidents From 1979 Through 1989" (Th.D. diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991), 39-40.

<sup>36</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 17 August 2006.

noteworthy omission in his preaching and teaching, but he is to be commended for looking to Acts as the model for evangelism. He stated: “No criticism intended, but the model we want is not some contemporary model, but the New Testament.”<sup>37</sup> In my estimation, as is demonstrated in his treatment of the Book of Acts, Vines’ ministry bears the fruit of this commitment.

### **An Enduring Evangelistic Focus**

As he commended Moody for being a man of all-encompassing commitment, Dorsett stated: “Moody, like all great men, had a single focus.”<sup>38</sup> The single focus that saturated the heart and mind of Vines and during his years of pastoral ministry was the salvation of the lost. From his early days as a new believer to the present, he has always consistently sought to share his faith and to lead other believers to do likewise. It occasionally caused him to experience resistance in his earlier days of the ministry. He was motivated to become a significant figure in the Conservative Resurgence because of it. He endured personal attack in his effort to expose the fallacy of Islam and proclaim the exclusivity of Christ. Evangelistic focus is a prevalent aspect of every chapter of Vines’ life and ministry, thus making him a model of evangelistic leadership in an era that such leaders are too few and far between.

### **Other Matters**

Vines has been a figure of significant importance in the present milieu of Southern Baptist life. It is tempting to romanticize him and overlook the areas of weakness in his ministry. Yet, to do so would not be appropriate. Scholarship demands an honest analysis of these matters. Discourse on these matters promises to offer lessons for

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Dorsett, *A Passion*, 388.

future evangelistic results that are perhaps as insightful as his previously discussed qualities worthy of emulation.

### **Application of the Great Commission**

Vines' view of the purposes of the church is refreshingly simple. According to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), the church has two overarching purposes. It is to set itself to the task of winning the lost to Christ. Simultaneously, it is also responsible for helping believers grow in their relationship with Christ. He believed that it was of the utmost importance that the churches he pastored demonstrate sincere devotion to each of these purposes. As he instructed his ministerial staff in their objectives, he prioritized the task of winning the lost slightly ahead that of discipleship. He reasoned this prioritization was necessary to prevent a church from turning inward and forsaking its commitment to the Great Commission.

A likely premise for his prioritization of evangelism over discipleship is Vines' motivating "irresistible logic of the Bible." As is stated repeatedly in this dissertation, it asserts that if there truly is a heaven and a hell; and if Jesus is the only way to heaven; then the most important activity of a believer is to tell someone how they can avoid hell and go to heaven by trusting Christ as Savior. The instructions he gave his staff regarding the Great Commission captures the urgency of this logic, and in seeking to convey this urgency, his leadership was on target. Yet, his assertion that evangelism must be prioritized over and above discipleship to protect the church's outward focus lacks biblical warrant.

Malcolm Yarnell writes of an alternative approach that coincides with Vines' theological method. It too considers the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) to be a central passage for churches and seeks to motivate individual believers to fulfill it. Rather than slightly subjugate discipleship to evangelism, it calls for radical Christian discipleship intent on the making of disciples. This approach to discipleship is in accord

with the Anabaptist theological tradition that “believed salvation starts in justification but continues in sanctification and ends in glorification. The entire process of salvation can be described as *Nachfolge*, discipleship, in which a disciple unwaveringly displays the attitude of *Gelassenheit*, or yieldedness, to Christ.”<sup>39</sup>

Within this attitude of complete yieldedness, a believer will be motivated to share the gospel, regardless of the cost. He will willingly traverse the path of the radical Christian discipleship of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose *Cost of Discipleship* led to his own murder at the hands of the Nazi state only days before the liberation of his prison camp.<sup>40</sup> When Jesus calls to these yielded believers to go and make disciples of all nations, they respond without hesitation. Their relentless commitment to Him is more than enough to move them to action and keep them from turning inward.

### **Missions in the Book of Acts**

Vines’ treatment of Acts as the witnessing book is his greatest contribution to personal evangelism within the setting of the local church. Chapter five contends that Vines’ work offers implicit application of Acts for world missions, but to do so explicitly would enhance it even more. As he gives Acts 1:8 contemporary application, he asserts:

The conclusion of Acts 1:8 indicates the places where witnessing is to occur. They are to begin where they are: “Jerusalem.” Point out to them that this means start right where you are. Do their family members know Christ? Are all of their children saved? Jesus said to Legion, “...go home...and tell...” (Mark 5:19). “Judea and Samaria” indicates that they are to witness to those around them. Are their neighbors saved? What about those they work with? You come in contact everyday with those who need a witness. “Unto the uttermost part of the earth” means, to the end of the earth...Christians must have a heart big enough to include the world.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Malcolm Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 13-14.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>41</sup>Jerry Vines, *Witnesses Alive: A Witnessing Church in the Twentieth Century* (Nashville: The Sunday School Board, 1991), 7.

Every component of this application for Act's Great Commission text is sound. The weakness is found not in what Vines says, but in what is left unsaid. He only hints at Acts' emphasis on reaching the world. He does not strongly enough assert a central theme of the book to be world missions.

In John Polhill's commentary on Acts, application of the book is broadened beyond that which is attested to above by Vines. World missions comes first in his listing of the themes of Acts. He considers Luke to be more explicit in this particular theme than he is in any other theme contained within Acts. He explains:

If Luke gave an explicit clue to his purpose anywhere in Acts, it would be the thematic 1:8. In answer to the disciples' question about the restoration of the kingdom, Jesus set before them a mission to the world. They were to be witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth... The ends of the earth are never reached in Acts. The mission goal is never completed. It remains open, yet to be fulfilled. . . . The abrupt ending of the book is open-ended. There are many "completed" missions in Acts. Each of Paul's has a sort of closure with his return to Antioch or Jerusalem. But each ending is the starting point for a new beginning. Perhaps that is the missionary message of Acts. The story remains open. There must always be new beginnings. The "ends of the earth" are still out there to receive the witness to Christ.<sup>42</sup>

Vines' treatment of Acts is not contradictory to Polhill's observation. Acts is rightly called a witnessing book, but it is also a missionary book. The most significant difference in Polhill's view and Vines' is that what Vines conveys implicitly is explicitly conveyed in the text itself. Vines' treatment of the book, when combined with Polhill's observation, would broaden the scope of a preacher's application of Acts to include the geographical and ethnic concentric circles of concern implied by Luke in Acts 1:8. Thus, students of this amended *Acts Alive* curriculum would be challenged to not only possess a burden for their community, they would also be spurred to have a missional burden for the world.

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<sup>42</sup>John B. Polhill, *Acts*, in vol. 26 of *The New American Commentary*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1992).

### **Embattled Posture**

Vines' ministry career demonstrates tenacity and resilience. Within at least one of the churches he pastored, he faithfully preached and led in the midst of resistance and criticism. His leadership in the Conservative Resurgence required him to be a soldier in the battle for the inerrancy of Scripture. By the time he was attacked by pundits over his comments against Muhammad late in his ministerial career, his need to stand strong was a position to which he had grown accustomed. It is fair to assert that his embattled posture found its way into particular matters of theology, preaching, and ministry that did not necessitate a fight.

One discovers unwarranted aggression in his writing on Bible preaching. In *A Practical Guide*, Vines correctly asserts that Bible preaching always points to evangelism. Then he further contends that Bible preaching which does not offer a call for the unsaved to receive Christ as Savior borders on heresy.<sup>43</sup> I am sympathetic to the reasons that motivated the strength of these statements. His irresistible logic, a statement of good theology, attests to it being nearly impossible for a believer to be overcommitted to evangelism. Yet, it would be appropriate for Vines to remove the charge of heresy from this instruction on evangelism in expository preaching. An acceptable definition of heresy is offered M. R. W. Farrer. He defines it as “a deliberate denial of revealed truth coupled with the acceptance of error.”<sup>44</sup> Hence, the charge of being on the brink of heresy does not fit the occasion when a preacher of the gospel fails to present his audience with an invitation for salvation. A preacher may indeed fall short of his commitment to preaching the full gospel message, but this failure may speak more to a preacher's human frailty than a deliberate denial of revealed truth.

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<sup>43</sup>Jerry Vines, *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 146-47.

<sup>44</sup>M. R. W. Farrer, “Heresy.” In *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 508.

Vines is correct in his strong position that Bible preaching always points to evangelism. Yet, he is equally correct in acknowledging that while it is always appropriate to share Christ, there are times that an obligatory invitation for salvation will weaken a message if the gospel is presented as a disjointed addendum to a sermon. Vines' writings address these weighty issues, and he beckons expositors to continually evaluate the prevalence of the gospel in their preaching. But it is not a commitment to presenting the gospel by way of an invitation that protects one's preaching from heresy. It is the faithful study and careful preaching of the Bible that offers this protection.

Further evidence of his embattled posture is found in the dispensational fence he erects to protect his prescriptive hermeneutic. This fence rightly recognizes that a prescriptive hermeneutic for Acts requires boundaries. But in an effort to prevent his listeners from adopting a faulty paradigm for the book that encourages an experience of Spirit-baptism in addition to conversion, he determines the book to hail from a period of transition history. Its transitory nature requires the affirmation of its doctrine from New Testament books that follow it.

Vines' hermeneutic for Acts is helpful. It acknowledges the need for a prescriptive approach to the book and beckons the interpreter to skillfully bridge the gap from Acts' historical setting to modern day application. But the boundaries necessary to prevent Acts' historical narrative genre from breaking lines with orthodoxy are found within proper exegesis. Protection against the theological error that a prescriptive treatment of the book has been known to provoke does not require adherence to dispensationalism. I find this approach to be unnecessarily restrictive in its hermeneutic and theological method. David G. Peterson is an example of one who accomplishes a protection of Acts in a more acceptable fashion. From a non-dispensationalist position, he asserts:

Although we should be open to the possibility that God can work miracles in any age, it is important to understand the reason for signs and wonders in the NT being especially associated with the ministry of Jesus and the apostles. We should

not expect God to do the same things today, envisaging them as an aspect of “the normal Christian life.” Nor should it be expected that signs and wonders will necessarily have an important role in contemporary evangelism, overcoming resistance to the gospel and making people more receptive to its claim. Evangelism without accompanying signs and wonders is in no sense incomplete. The gospel alone is fully sufficient to lead to faith in Christ and the salvation he has won for us.<sup>45</sup>

There is valid cause to critique Vines’ transitional dispensation view of Acts, yet to do so does not diminish the value of his treatment of the book. The matters related to his dispensationalism do not alter the preliminary and secondary applications that Vines derives from the text. In fact, they are not discussed in the Sunday School curriculum that he has written on the topic. Hence, if one is a dispensationalist or not, he can still glean from Vines’ findings and utilize his hermeneutical method to make discoveries in personal evangelism of his own.

There is another place in Vines’ thinking where he overapplies his protective spirit. He rejects Calvinism on the grounds that he views it as a threat to evangelism. In an interview with me, Vines discussed the importance of rejecting any view that squelched one’s zeal for evangelism. In his seminary days, that threat was liberalism. Today, he perceives that threat to be Calvinism.<sup>46</sup>

In setting Calvinism and liberalism together as threats to evangelism, Vines seems to have shifted the object of his opposition from liberalism, which he resiliently battled as a leader of the Conservative Resurgence, to Calvinism, which he publicly opposes today. This dissertation affirms his skillful rebuttals to the Doctrines of Grace. As a whole, I am largely persuaded by them. But associating the gospel-less tenants of liberalism with Reformed theology casts the die for an unnecessary skirmish. Biblically

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<sup>45</sup>David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 86.

<sup>46</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 17 August 2006. Vines’ protective posture is detectable in the title of a recent sermon series in which he confronts Pentecostalism, Libertinism, and Calvinism in the same series as Liberalism called *Baptist Battles*.

driven Calvinists and non-Calvinists do have their differences. These differences should lead to honest dialogue. Yet, when each pursues a Vines-defined biblical theology, there is more that binds them together than keeps them apart.

### **Hermeneutical Concerns**

Within Vines' preaching are two unresolved interrelated tensions often debated in hermeneutics. The first of these pertains to the meaning found within a passage of Scripture. Robert H. Stein offers an acceptable definition for Vines' understanding of meaning. He defines it as "that pattern of meaning the author willed to convey by the words (shareable symbols) he used."<sup>47</sup> Vines, with Stein, believes the biblical author is the determiner of the text's meaning. Its meaning can never change, for it is locked in history.

The most detailed statement found in Vines' writings that explains his position of a single meaning within a text is found in a work he co-authored with David Allen. They offer the following explanation, included earlier in this work:

By way of illustration, we may say that the one primary meaning of a text is like an iceberg. The tip protrudes above water and is analogous to "meaning," but further investigation continues to yield fuller and deeper "meaning" just as the bulk of the iceberg is underwater. It is the same iceberg and hence the same meaning. The iceberg itself furnishes the constraints which guide and limit the interpreter's potential elicitation of meaning. The *kind* of meaning we find in a text depends to some extent on the kind of meaning for which we are looking. Sometimes interpreters differ on a given text because they are looking for different kinds of meaning and from different perspectives. But it is the iceberg/text which determines the meaning capable of being drawn out, not the interpreters themselves, although they contribute to it.<sup>48</sup>

This explanation consistently asserts there to be one meaning within a text. Yet, if a text contains a deeper underlying meaning, similar to the bulk of the iceberg that lies beneath the surface of the water, it stands to reason that the Holy Spirit infused a

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<sup>47</sup>Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 38.

<sup>48</sup>Jerry Vines and David Allen, "Hermeneutics, Exegesis, and Proclamation," *Criswell Theological Review* 1.2 (1987): 316.

meaning into a text of which the human biblical author was unaware. Since interpreters can now access the full canon of Scripture, the iceberg illustration implies that they understand texts in fuller ways than the biblical authors understood it themselves.

Vines' hermeneutical method in *Power*, which borrows heavily from Walter C. Kaiser Jr.'s *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, supports a more consistent understanding of a text's meaning. Interestingly, it opposes the single meaning explanation espoused in his iceberg illustration above. Kaiser's view affirms Stein's definition of meaning and posits that interpreters cannot understand an author's words better than the author himself.<sup>49</sup> What Vines and Allen call meaning is termed by Kaiser to be significance. Each text possesses malleable significance that changes as interests, questions, and the *sitz en leben* of a particular interpreter changes. Yet, though the significance of a passage changes, its meaning never does. The author's intended meaning is what the text means. It is accessible to the interpreter and may be understood by him as clearly as it was understood by the author. While its significance is related, it is a distinctly different matter.<sup>50</sup>

Kaiser is convincing. I am closely aligned with Vines' view in *Power* rather than the approach he posits in "Hermeneutics, Exegesis, and Proclamation." Each text has but one meaning that is the "conscious willed meaning of God's inspired prophets

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<sup>49</sup>Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1981), 36.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 31-34. For a discussion of the matters related to the author's intention and biblical interpretation, see Elliot Johnson, "Author's Intention and Biblical Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1984), 409-29; Earl D. Radmacher, "A Response to Author's Intention and Biblical Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1984), 433-37; and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "A Response to Author's Intention and Biblical Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1984), 441-47.

and apostles.”<sup>51</sup> Through the Holy Spirit, interpreters can understand the meaning of a text as well as its author, but it is contradictory to view an interpreter as having the capability of understanding a text more clearly than its human author. The iceberg illustration leaves room for this kind of understanding of meaning. A text likely possesses significance of which the author was unaware, but that significance is separate from, but related to, a text’s meaning. It must legitimately fall within the pattern of meaning the author willed.

Vines’ position on the Christo-centric hermeneutic is another hermeneutical matter unclear in Vines’ sermons and writings. I raise this concern because of its interrelatedness to issues of meaning mentioned above. Vines asserts that Jesus should be preached in every sermon. He states that preaching Jesus is “good Bible preaching.” Also, when one preaches through the Bible, he will find Jesus all the way through.<sup>52</sup> These statements seem to support the position of Graeme Goldsworthy and Dennis E. Johnson who believe that all Christian preaching, through both the Old and New Testaments, should focus on the centrality of the gospel.<sup>53</sup> Yet, in *Power*, Vines and Shaddix side with Kaiser and contend that “there is always in a passage of Scripture a

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<sup>51</sup>Stein, *A Basic Guide*, 28.

<sup>52</sup>Several times in his messages he makes statements such as, “When you preach Jesus Christ you are doing good preaching.” In Jerry Vines, “Powerbook: Oh What a Day!” [on-line]; a sermon manuscript of an exposition of Acts 2:1-41 delivered at the First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL on 21 May 2000; accessed 27 March 2008; available from <http://www.sermonsearch.com>; Internet. Also, see Vines, “Powerbook: O What a Name.” In “Powerbook: Desert Encounters,” when preaching the Bible, he states, “It’s Jesus, Jesus, Jesus all the way through.”

<sup>53</sup>Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 5. Also consider the work of Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2007), 14. Johnson claims that above all, his suggested approach of apostolic preaching must be Christ-centered. Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 227, Greidanus supports what he calls the Redemptive-Historical Christocentric Interpretation.

theological content that has its roots antecedent to the passage.”<sup>54</sup> These two hermeneutical approaches are at odds with one another. To side with Kaiser would give a preacher pause before preaching Jesus all the way through if the antecedent theology predated the life of Christ. Yet, an advocate of the Goldsworthy and Johnson camp would not hesitate to preach Christ from the Old Testament. Vines’ claim to support both approaches is puzzling when it is considered in light of the views mentioned above. When I directly asked him into which of these two camps he falls, he voiced a view consistent with his writings and preaching, for he advocates a both/and approach.<sup>55</sup>

My evaluation of these two approaches is that a both/and approach is not possible. I do concede to Vines that the both/and answer is enticing. The hermeneutical tension between the camps can potentially confuse students of the Bible, for there are attractive qualities in both. Yet, an interpreter must choose between the two camps and consistently apply his selected approach to his interpretation of his particular preaching text.

I see great value in the Goldsworthy camp, but I advocate the position of Kaiser, Stein, and E. D. Hirsch, Jr.<sup>56</sup> I find it nearly impossible to hold to a text’s single meaning as described above and also hold to the gospel centered hermeneutic of Goldsworthy and Johnson. One’s definition of meaning has to be broadened beyond that which I deem acceptable to allow for the Christ-centered view. Each text has but one meaning which is the pattern of meaning the author willed to convey by the words he used. The implications, of which the author may or may not have been aware, must fall legitimately within the pattern of the meaning he willed. The theological significance of a

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<sup>54</sup>Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 121.

<sup>55</sup>Jerry Vines, e-mail correspondence by author, 24 November 2008.

<sup>56</sup>See Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical*; Stein, *A Basic Guide*; and E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale London Press, 1967).

text is constrained by its antecedent revelation. Then after its meaning, implications, and significance are determined, it can be rightly understood according to where it fits in the unfolding storyline of God's plan in redemptive history.<sup>57</sup>

### **Disparity in Theory and Practice**

A prevalent mark that I find in most every key figure I have studied is the existing disparity between the theories they assert and the practice of those theories. Vines is no exception, though I recognize in him an exceptional commitment to live true to the theories and principles and practices that he values. Yet, there are particular areas in these regards that merit mention.

An especially challenging element of an evaluation of Vines' life and ministry pertains to his treatment of systematic theology. In theory, he admits to being unsystematic. He does not view systematic theology as valueless, but he does believe that logical conclusions based in systematic theology often lead those who hold to them away from biblical theology. Thus, he finds a pursuit of a biblical theology to be the *sine qua non* of all theological pursuits. Logical conclusions are tainted with man's imperfections, but it is the biblical truths of the Bible that stand any test of scrutiny.

I find qualities of notable merit within his striving for a biblical theology. Yet his position that subjects systematic theology to his biblical theological pursuit seems inconsistent with his practice of an especially systematic statement that he calls the irresistible logic of the Bible. It states:

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<sup>57</sup>My position is essentially the same as that expressed by Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 228. He calls his approach the "Redemptive-Historical Christocentric Interpretation," and asserts: "Redemptive-historical interpretation seeks to understand an Old Testament passage first in its own historical-cultural context. Only after we have heard a passage the way Israel heard it can we move on to understand the message in the broad contexts of the whole canon and the whole of redemptive history. It is at this point that the questions concerning Jesus Christ, the center, emerge."

If there is a heaven and there is, and if there is a hell and there is. And if Jesus died on the cross to make it possible for people to go to heaven and to not go to hell, then the most important business of the church is to let people know that they do not have to go to hell, they can go to heaven. And because Jesus died on that cross for their sins it is possible for them to go to heaven.<sup>58</sup>

Vines' logic begins by stating orthodox eschatological doctrines of the reality of a literal heaven and hell. These assertions are followed by the Christological reality that Jesus, the God man, accomplished the soteriological plan of God by dying on the cross as a substitute for humanity's sin. Christ accomplished this work to make it possible for humanity to avoid hell and inhabit heaven. Thus, it is through a synthesis of eschatology, Christology and soteriology that Christians receive their missiological assignment to tell others about Jesus who died on the cross for their sins and made it possible for them to go to heaven.

This thread of theological statements is central to Vines' preaching and evangelism. Where one would anticipate a statement congruent with his pursuit of a biblical theology as the basis for his view of evangelism, one finds instead a statement that is strikingly systematic in its nature. This is one of the most obvious ways that systematic theology serves a vital role in Vines' ministry whether his theory allows for it or not.

Another aspect of his ministry in which his theory exceeds his practice is in his writings on preaching with an evangelistic appeal. In *A Practical Guide*, Vines asserts that Bible preaching always points to evangelism. Yet in *Power in the Pulpit*, he admits there to be times when an invitation for salvation may not best serve a sermon following a call for Christians to act upon the subject of a message. In these times, for the preacher

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<sup>58</sup>Jerry Vines, "The Church's Main Business," audio recorded message of an exposition of Matthew 28:16-20 delivered at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL 2003; CD. In this message, Vines explains this quote "the irresistible logic of the church." In a personal interview with the author, 25 August 2009, he refers to this concept as the "irresistible logic of the Bible," and the "irresistible logic of evangelism."

to give an invitation runs the risk of making it appear to be a disjointed addendum to the message.<sup>59</sup> These instructions, when one juxtaposes them together, lead the expositor to a conundrum. If he determines an invitation to salvation does not fit the sermon due to its subject matter, he ceases to be a Bible preacher. If he then chooses to go ahead with an invitation for salvation, he turns the gospel into a disjointed addendum. These matters are further complicated by Vines' acknowledgement that most of the Bible is written to believers.

There exists at least two potential solutions to this dilemma. The first solution is to treat part of the above statement from *Power* as an overstatement. As it reads, "All Bible preaching issues forth into evangelism. Regardless of the Bible content of your message, the subject should include an evangelistic appeal"<sup>60</sup> suggests that a preacher has not faithfully preached the Bible if he preached a sermon and text designed for believers. By editing the statement to read, "Bible preaching *regularly* issues forth into evangelism," a sermon aimed at Christian obedience without an invitation for salvation would be acceptable trusting that the preacher does consistently call for his audience to receive Christ.

There are a few weaknesses to this solution. First, it does not give a solution to a visiting preacher who chooses to preach a text that calls for Christian obedience. If he does not offer an invitation for salvation, he does not have a corpus of sermons from which to demonstrate that he regularly called for the unsaved to receive Christ. Furthermore, it introduces a subjective component to the determining of Bible preaching. The way one person defines *regularly* will vary from another, leading to potential disagreement over whether or not the preacher is indeed, a Bible preacher.

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<sup>59</sup>Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermon* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 178-79.

<sup>60</sup>Vines, *A Practical Guide*, 146.

Though their solution is subtle and easily overlooked, Vines and Shaddix offer a better solution to the dilemma. While suggesting that every invitation incorporate an evangelistic twist, they instruct: “Always turn the message *at some point* toward an appeal to the unsaved.”<sup>61</sup> This pithy instruction also reduces the tension of the preacher’s predicament and is a better solution than the subjectively weakened option above. There are times that a subject of obedience may not be best served by an evangelistic appeal at the conclusion of the message. Any attempt by the expositor to introduce the gospel at this point may feel forced and appear to be a disconnected addendum. It might also weaken the appeal for believers to consider the subject matter of the message and respond obediently.

Thus, a way to insure that Vines’ criterion for Bible preaching is achieved is to incorporate a gospel plea into some other point in the message. Then, while utilizing the mode of invitation that best fits the context of the service, the disjointed feel of the invitation will be avoided. The invitation can call believers to act on the given truth of the sermon. Then it can transition, by way of a twist, into an evangelistic appeal built on the gospel as it has already been presented.

Vines’ own practice of preaching does not stand the scrutiny of this test all the time. He did present the gospel in every Sunday morning message analyzed in my research. He did much of the same in his Sunday evening and Wednesday evening preaching. Yet, there were times that he preached on matters of obedience and did not articulate a full gospel presentation calling the lost to salvation.<sup>62</sup> His Convention sermons and pastors’ conference preaching are worthy of this same critique. In these times, he appropriately preached on matters of obedience and did not tack on the gospel

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<sup>61</sup>Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 218. Emphasis mine.

<sup>62</sup>A helpful example of this kind of faithful preaching is Jerry Vines, *A Journey through the Bible: A Preaching Series from Genesis to Revelation* [CD] (Jacksonville, FL: n.p., n.d.).

as an addendum. He did not always honor the absolute nature of his principle of preaching expository sermons with an evangelistic appeal.

### **Retention Rate of Baptisms**

Vines' preaching and pastoral ministry is a model of evangelistic focus in the context of the local church. The annual baptism statistics that accompanied his ministry are exceptional, especially when one considers the present milieu of evangelistic ineffectiveness as is suggested in chapter one. Yet, the lack luster retention rate of these baptized congregants is a weakness of Vines' ministry.

Vines' ministry did not work against the retention of baptized members, but my research did not discover the way(s) he addressed the issue. He tirelessly worked to promote a "soul consciousness" within the congregations that he pastored so that his members would faithfully share the gospel, but perhaps there is another aspect of soul consciousness that a pastor must work to encourage.<sup>63</sup> Along with a genuine concern for a lost person's conversion, the "soul consciousness" of a congregation must also include a corporate concern for a person's sanctification. Each baptism offers a congregation an opportunity to grow in its soul consciousness and intentionally seek to retain these newly baptized believers.

Now that I have discussed the strengths and weaknesses of Vines' ministry, I will now turn this dissertation toward its close. There are questions raised in the first chapter of this dissertation which, from the beginning of my research, I have sought to answer. I summarize the answers to those questions yielded in my research in the following section, and at times, will briefly critique them. I then move into a discussion of other areas of further study of the life and ministry of Vines. I conclude this work by offering final thoughts and reflections.

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<sup>63</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 17 August 2006.

### **Issues Raised and Answered**

In the opening chapter of this dissertation, several questions helped to chart a course in looking at Vines' preaching ministry as a model for evangelistic focus. The answers to these initial questions related to the preliminary research problem follows.

1. What experiences in Vines' own life shaped his unswerving commitment to being an evangelistic pastor? What enabled him to maintain his theological convictions while receiving his theological training in environments that were sympathetic to liberalism?

Several experiences in Vines' life helped to shape his unswerving commitment to being an evangelistic pastor. The witnessing encounter in which he led two young boys to Christ had a lasting effect on Vines that he never forgot. The ordination prayer for him to remain true to the Bible, prayed by his "country evangelist" grandfather as he fought back his tears, was a memory permanently etched in his mind. The eight conversions that occurred at a revival meeting after he spent nearly a full day in prayer, the discipleship he received from his personal Bible reading and the writings of George W. Truett, and the evangelistic fruit that came from his evangelistic visitation that he conducted at a feverish pace, were some of the experiences that deepened his commitment to lead a church to grow in its evangelistic fervor.

These experiences all took place during the formative years of Vines' life and ministry. In the face of the liberalism he encountered during his college days at Mercer University and the brackish mixture of liberalism and conservatism at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, it was his love for Bible and passion for the lost that enabled him to remain steadfast in his theological convictions. Anything he was taught in seminary passed through the grid of his evangelistic zeal. He embraced only doctrines that intensified his commitment to evangelism.

2. Who were the leading influences in Vines' life and ministry in regard to his commitment to evangelism? Are any of these influencers' theology or methodology traceable in Vines' ministry?

The leading influences that have shaped Vines' life and ministry in regard to

his commitment to evangelism were L. R. Scarborough, Gray Allison, and Jesse Hendley. Scarborough, whose faculty position at Southwestern Seminary was known as the “chair of fire,” spurred Vines toward his commitment to evangelism through his book, *With Christ after the Lost*.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, Scarborough’s exemplary leadership at the denominational level provided lessons for Vines as he accepted similar posts and assignments. Scarborough united the convention around the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20). The evangelistic goals that would later mark Vines’ two terms as president of the Southern Baptist Convention demonstrated his attempts to do likewise.

Allison’s class lectures and influence as Vines’ evangelism professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary ingrained in a young Vines, through his example, lectures, and accountability in evangelism the need to be a consistent, winsome witness. Hendley impacted Vines through his rigorous commitment to sermon preparation, mastery of the biblical languages, and honest, passionate preaching on the reality of hell. These three qualities were found at the foundation of Vines’ preaching ministry.

3. What does Vines mean when he says that a person must pursue a biblical theology? Is what he calls “biblical theology” different from what is normally understood to be biblical theology? How does his pursuit of a biblical theology affect his systematic theology?

The central premise for Vines’ theological method is his pursuit of a biblical theology. When he discusses the importance of a “biblical theology,” in his own life and ministry, he is defining the term differently than its commonly accepted usage. G.E. Ladd, noted for his advocacy of biblical theology, offers the following definition:

Biblical theology is that discipline which sets forth the message of the books of the Bible in their historical setting. Biblical theology is primarily a descriptive discipline. Biblical theology has the task of expounding the theology found in the

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<sup>64</sup>L. R. Scarborough, *With Christ after the Lost* (Nashville: Sunday School Board, 1919), 149-51.

Bible in its own historical setting, and its own terms, categories, and thought forms.<sup>65</sup>

When Vines uses the term “biblical theology,” he is describing a pursuit of doctrinal positions that are purely defined and determined by Scripture. In his theological approach he is averse to labels. He attempts to say nothing more, or less, than the Scriptures say.

Rather than look to a respected systematic theologian’s work to help to settle his doctrinal positions, he strove for a pure and precise theology. He attempted to guard himself against logical conclusions that led him to theological positions that he could not substantiate with Scripture. Thus, he accepted tensions in his theology when he read them in the Scriptures. He found merit in systematic theology, but he admitted that any person’s systematic theology, his included, attempts to systematize that which cannot be systematized.<sup>66</sup>

#### 4. Why does Vines hold the theological conviction that Calvinism is a threat to evangelism?

Vines holds the conviction that Calvinism is a threat to evangelism for a myriad of reasons. Most importantly, he does not find Calvinism to be biblical. He acknowledges that historical Baptist confessions possess Calvinistic theology and he affirms this theology when he finds biblical truth within it. Yet, he is weary of the philosophy that he finds within the doctrines of grace. He rejects all five points of Calvinism because he finds unbiblical logical conclusions in each one. He has personally experienced that many Calvinists carry themselves with an heir of intellectual arrogance. Finally, he perceives, based on his understanding of the doctrines of grace, Calvinism would diminish his zeal for evangelism. He posits that church history and contemporary life are replete with examples of Calvinists who have a red hot passion for evangelism,

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<sup>65</sup>G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 25 as quoted by William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 383.

<sup>66</sup>Jerry Vines, personal interview by author, 17 August 2006.

but he has determined that they are evangelistic in spite of their Calvinism, not because of it. In his seminary days, it was liberalism that had a squelching effect on his desire to win lost souls for Christ. Today, he views aspects of Reformed theology in similar fashion. This dissertation affirms many of Vines' critiques of Calvinism as well as his concern for the impact that hypercalvinism might have on the evangelistic endeavors of the Southern Baptist Convention. Yet, this dissertation does not agree with his implied comparisons of Reformed theology and the liberalism he fought during the Conservative Resurgence.

5. How faithful is Vines to his use and practice of what he calls a sermon's evangelistic twist? How does Vines apply the twist to various Old and New Testament texts and genres? Does every biblical passage possess an evangelistic twist much like Bryan Chapell argues that every passage possesses one or more fallen condition foci? Can Haddon Robinson's "Ladder of Abstraction" be applied to Vines' attempt to preach an evangelistic twist in conjunction with each of his expository sermons?

Vines is faithful in his use and practice of that which he has coined a sermon's evangelistic twist. A survey of his preaching reveals what one would expect to find in the study of a preacher's weekly pastoral preaching: some examples are of better quality than others. Vines applies the twist in a variety of ways in various Old and New Testament texts and genres. At the beginning of my research, I perceived my analysis of his evangelistic twist to be a matter of interpretation. My research led me away from this approach, for I discovered his use of the twist to be a matter of homiletics rather than hermeneutics. He twists the sermon toward evangelism rather than twisting the text. Therefore, biblical passages do not possess an evangelistic twist. Bryan Chapell's *Fallen Condition Focus*<sup>67</sup> does not bear upon the discussion of the twist, and neither does Haddon Robinson's "Ladder of Abstraction."<sup>68</sup> While it is true that biblical passages are

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<sup>67</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 40-44.

<sup>68</sup>Haddon Robinson, "The Heresy of Application: It's When We're Applying Scripture that Error is Most Likely to Creep In," *Leadership* 18:4 (1997): 20-27.

not to be twisted to evangelism, I affirm Vines' position that a pastor's expositions of these passages must.

6. While deciding upon an acceptable evangelistic twist, what are principles that will guide its practice? What are pitfalls that a preacher is wise to avoid?

Surveying Vines' preaching has led to the discovery of principles and pitfalls of the twist. When seeking to formulate the evangelistic twist into a sermon, an expositor should twist the sermon and not the text. The sermon's proposition often determines what type of evangelistic twist to use. When formulating the evangelistic twist, an expositor should consider the audience's need for a smooth transition from body of the sermon to its evangelistic appeal. An evangelistic twist of high quality will help the speaker to connect with his audience's minds and hearts. A final principle is that the preacher should work to make the evangelistic twist fresh and unpredictable.

There are pitfalls that a preacher can fall into when seeking to utilize an evangelistic twist. In order to guard against these pitfalls, he must avoid sacrificing clarity for creativity. He should stay clear of the ruts of redundancy. Finally, by avoiding the appearance of obligation he will express his excitement at the privilege of giving an evangelistic appeal.

7. Does Vines interpret Acts prescriptively or descriptively in regard to its application for the church's approach to evangelism? What are the parameters that Vines places upon his hermeneutic that prevents it from straying into a misuse of the text? What are the truths that he uncovered in Acts that led his church to embrace a commitment to evangelism?

Vines employed a guarded prescriptive hermeneutic of Acts in regard to the preliminary applications of personal evangelism for believers of all ages. This hermeneutic is reproducible and promises to lead an expositor to further applications of Acts for the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The primary way he guards his hermeneutic against a misuse of the text is in his position that Acts is a theological book, but while it supports sound doctrine, it does not germinate it. He places within his

approach a transition dispensational safeguard. Yet, this dispensational fence can be removed from his hermeneutical approach without affecting Acts' timeless truths for personal evangelism. The fruit of Vines' hermeneutic of the book are timeless applications for personal evangelism.

### **Areas for Further Study**

There are several areas of further study in looking at Vines as a model of evangelistic focus. First, Jim Shaddix suggests it would be beneficial to study Vines' references to evangelism and soul winning in his messages.<sup>69</sup> Through conducting this study, one could determine if there is consistency and balance with Vines' references to personal evangelism as compared to his references to global missions and church planting. Chapter five would contribute to this effort in regard to his treatment of the book of Acts.

Second, a superficial glance at the impressive baptism numbers of First Baptist Jacksonville, Florida, when compared to average Sunday School and worship attendance, leads one to question the whereabouts of these new converts. I believe it is unhelpful to simply assume all this disparity is caused by spurious conversions, but having experienced similar realities on a much smaller scale, I would find it invaluable to learn how Vines led his staff to address these matters over the course of his tenure. Furthermore, a statistical analysis of follow-up interviews of First Baptist Jacksonville, Florida's baptized members would likely yield a significant contribution in the discussion of regenerate church membership.

Third, this dissertation delved into the content and structure of Vines' preaching, but it did not analyze his delivery. In *Power in the Pulpit* and *A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery*, Vines goes to great lengths to discuss ways a preacher can

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<sup>69</sup>Jim Shaddix, email interview by author, 30 May 2006.

improve the mechanics of his sermon delivery.<sup>70</sup> It would prove beneficial to learn how Vines' commitment to effective sermon delivery impacted his evangelistic focus. A student of the field of evangelism and church growth would be wise to consider the recommendations for further study suggested above. The dissertation will now conclude with final thoughts and reflections.

### **Final Thoughts and Reflections**

As I reflect on my nine years of being a pastor, great changes have come to church ministry. Yesterday's contemporary worship music is considered to be traditional music today. Evangelistic strategies such as F.A.I.T.H.<sup>71</sup> and systematic visitation ministry have given way to other transformational church strategies. Buzz words such as "missional," "emergent," and "emerging" are used to describe particular church movements. They seemed to be new terms not too long ago. Now, they are not so new. Pastors are now encouraged by some to adopt a C.E.O. mentality for ministry. Sunday School ministry used to be expected in church ministry; It is now commonly replaced by community groups that meet in the homes of church members. Pastor-deacon polity is often replaced with elders and even if it is not, one can no longer assume a standard polity in Southern Baptist churches. Hermeneutics for proclamation seem to emphasize a biblical theological Christo-centric hermeneutic over the exegetical theology of Walter C. Kaiser.

The trends mentioned above are just a few of the more recent changes in church ministry. In an effort to keep pace, my temptation as a pastor is to read the latest books and attend the most recent conferences. Change is inevitable, but before long, this approach to ministry feels much like the doubter in James 1:6 who is compared to the

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<sup>70</sup>Jerry Vines, *A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery* (Moody: Chicago, 1986).

<sup>71</sup>Bobby H. Welch and Doug Williams, *A Journey in FAITH: Facilitator Guide* (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 1998).

surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. The ultimate anchor against this storm is the Word of God. Models of evangelistic focus should lead one to this anchor.

This dissertation asserts Jerry Vines to be such a model. Elements of Vines' ministry, as with any pastor, call for improvement. Furthermore, generational realities of his ministry, markedly different from what I will face, will present altogether new kinds of challenges for future ministerial effectiveness. Yet, in the changing tides of ministry, Vines' ministry highlights the value of keeping expository preaching, discipleship, and personal evangelism at the center of all a pastor seeks to accomplish. These foundations must remain the same. Studying Vines' life has deepened my passion for and pursuit of these bedrock principles. I hope this dissertation will help to have a similar effect in the ministry of its readers.

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## ABSTRACT

### THE PREACHING AND PASTORAL MINISTRY OF CHARLES JERRY VINES: A MODEL OF EVANGELISTIC FOCUS

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This dissertation examines and evaluates the preaching and pastoral ministry of Charles Jerry Vines as a model of evangelistic focus. Chapter 1 introduces the preaching and pastoral ministry of Jerry Vines as a model of evangelistic focus. The author addresses the broad concern of the evangelistic ineffectiveness of the Southern Baptist Convention and then establishes warrant for the particular qualities of Vines' preaching and pastoral ministries in regard to their connection to his evangelistic results.

Chapter 2 provides a biography of Charles Jerry Vines. Since very little biographical information has ever been formally collected on his life and ministry, this dissertation gives considerable attention to a thorough treatment of these matters. This chapter delves into the significant details of Vines' life to establish him as a worthy model of evangelistic focus.

Chapter 3 presents the theological framework that guides his methodology of evangelism. This chapter both describes and evaluates his theological underpinnings. It focuses on his views of theological method, revelation, atonement, pneumatology, soteriology, and eschatology.

Chapter 4 offers an overview of Vines' approach to expository preaching, focusing primarily on an element of his sermon structure that he calls an "evangelistic

twist.” It surveys how the twist is used in his preaching from texts that span from Genesis to Revelation. It discusses principles for the twist that lead a preacher to stay within the meaning of the text along with pitfalls to avoid while formulating the twist.

Chapter 5 examines Vines’ preaching and teaching through the book of Acts. The bases for this chapter are his most recent sermon series that he preached through the book of Acts along with his Sunday School Curriculum *Acts Alive*. It discusses Vines’ hermeneutical method, his guarded prescriptive hermeneutic for Acts, whether or not his dispensational view weighs in on the book’s application for personal evangelism, and a discussion of timeless truths pertinent to personal evangelism for the local church.

Chapter 6 offers concluding remarks that summarize the most pertinent findings of my research. It discusses qualities of Vines’ ministry worth emulating along with other matters of consideration.

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